MARY WARE IN TEXAS

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LITTLE · COLONEL · SERIES

1st ed.

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It would have been joy to her soul could she have seen herself—

MARY WARE IN TEXAS. CHAP XIII.

Mary Ware
in Texas

By ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON

Author of "The Little Colonel Series," "Big Brother," "Ole Mammy's Torment," "Joel: A Boy of Galilee," "Asa Holmes," etc.

Illustrated by FRANK T. MERRILL

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TO

F. V. P.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	In San Antonio	1
II.	In Search of a Home	25
III.	The Little Town of Bauer	51
IV.	Mary Finds Gay	71
V.	At Fort Sam Houston	93
VI.	On the Creek-bank	116
VII.	Christmas	139
VIII.	"Die Kleinen Teufel"	171
IX.	At the Barnaby Ranch	198
X.	In Joyce's Studio	230
XI.	Phil Goes to Warwick Hall	259
XII.	In "Blue-bonnet" Time	284
XIII.	Jack	308
XIV.	San Jacinto Day	329
XV.	New Trails	353

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

"IT WOULD HAVE BEEN JOY TO HER SOUL COULD SHE HAVE SEEN HERSELF" (*See page* 308) . *Frontispiece*

"'WHAT AN ADORABLE LITTLE CURL!'". . . . 7

"A DASHING GIRL IN KHAKI AND A COWBOY HAT, ASTRIDE A FIERY LITTLE MUSTANG" 59

"HE . . . SEATED HIMSELF BESIDE HER, COFFEE-CUP IN HAND" 113

"SHE SENT THE BOAT DOWN STREAM WITH LONG, SWIFT STROKES" 134

"THREE ALERT AND EXPECTANT LITTLE FIGURES SAT IN A ROW ON THE STEPS" 198

"LEANING AGAINST THE MANTEL, LOOKED DOWN AT HER, THOUGHTFULLY" 263

"'WELL, I'M GOING AWAY AND I MAY NOT SEE YOU AGAIN'" 375

MARY WARE IN TEXAS

CHAPTER I

IN SAN ANTONIO

The musicians were tuning their instruments somewhere behind the palms in the hotel courtyard. It was one of the older hotels of San Antonio, much sought by Northern tourists on account of that same inner garden, around which the big building stretched itself. The rooms opening on to it had vine-covered balconies, and, looking down from them into the tropical growth of palms and banana trees and roses, one felt that it was summer time, no matter what the calendar said.

It was on one of the second floor balconies at the close of a November day that Mary Ware stood looking around her with eager eyes. Queen's wreath and moon-vines made such a thick screen that no one could see her, so she might lean over the railing as far as she pleased to watch the bril-

liantly lighted scene below. Electric bulbs were strung through the cacti and devil's ivy like elfin lamps. There was a shine of brass buttons as colored bell boys scudded across the open space with clinking ice-pitchers or jingling keys, and through the glass doors beyond came the gleam of silver and flowers where the waiters were arranging the tables for dinner.

There was to be a military banquet in one of the private dining-rooms, and already the guests were beginning to arrive for the reception which was to precede it. So much bunting was draped over the arch between the office corridors and this inner court, that the view was somewhat obscured, but, by leaning dangerously far over the railing, Mary could catch a glimpse of the legs of a uniform now and then, strolling along beside the trailing skirt of a dainty evening gown.

All this warmth and life and color was in sharp contrast to the dreary solitudes of the snow covered mining camp which she had just left. It had been winter for nearly a month up in the hills of Arizona, and Lone Rock in the winter was such a barren waste socially that her present surroundings seemed wildly exciting. In Lone Rock it was a matter of comment whenever a human being passed the house,

and even a stray mule, stumbling along with a bell on its neck, was enough to call one to the windows.

The orchestra behind the palms having finished its tuning, swung into a gay two-step. At the sudden burst of music Mary drew a long breath and stood up straight, her pulses atingle. Something delightful was beginning to happen. Two girls, one in white and one in pale lemon-yellow, attended by a young lieutenant and a still younger man in civilian's evening dress, came out under the bunting-draped arch and strolled along past the banana trees to the garden seat just below her.

From her hiding place behind the moon-vines, Mary watched them as only a sociable little soul could watch, who for months had been hungering for such companionship. She clutched the railing with both hands, hoping fervently that they would stop.

They did pause for a few moments, just under the balcony, so near that for the little while they stood there she could almost feel herself to be one of the party. She could even smell the white violets that the girl in white wore on her corsage, and was close enough to see that an amber comb was slipping out of the soft auburn-bronze hair arranged

so becomingly on the graceful little head. Each laugh and gesture sent it slipping lower and lower till involuntarily Mary's hand went out to stop it. Then she drew back in confusion. She had almost called attention to herself by speaking aloud.

"Let's go into the other court," insisted the girl in yellow. "I want to show you the alligators in the fountain, Mr. Wade, to convince you that you're really in the sunny South. Some people can't appreciate alligators — Bogey there, for instance."

Her disdainful glance indicated the lieutenant. "He jeers at me for liking them, but I think they are more interesting than half the people one meets."

"*Bogey!* What a nickname for such a dignified officer," thought Mary, peeping over the railing to see how such banter was received. Evidently the lieutenant was accustomed to it, for he smiled indulgently as one would at a spoiled child.

"'Birds of a feather,' you know," was his answer. "Go on, Roberta. *I* don't care to flock with alligators myself, but if you do we'll follow and see it done."

Roberta deigned no reply but a glance intended to be withering, which failed in its purpose because it was only counterfeit. Her eyes were as dark as

a gypsy's and she had the curliest lashes Mary had ever seen. A boyish straightforwardness of manner contradicted their coquettish curliness, however. She had an air that comes only from being brought up in a houseful of teasing brothers. The man in civilian dress, whom she called Mr. Wade, watched her as if he had found a new species of girl, uncertain what she might say or do next. He was familiar with the coquettish kind and with the tom-boy kind, but this combination puzzled him.

Mary longed to follow as the four went slowly away together into the adjoining court, wholly unconscious that they had left an indelible memory behind them, or that they had revealed anything of themselves and their affairs to an unseen listener. But to Mary it was as if a new book had been opened before her and she had been allowed a glimpse of one page and the attractive picture that illustrated it. It was never necessary for her to begin at the first chapter of a book. Often, attracted by some paragraph in the middle, she would plunge into a story, only turning back for the beginning after she had pursued it eagerly through to the last word and found "how it all ended."

Now as the interesting group walked away she fervently hoped that fate would send them across

her path sometime again during her sojourn in San Antonio, that she might piece together the rest of the story. All that she knew now was that the girl in white was a daughter of one of the majors at Fort Sam Houston, that the lieutenant had known Roberta ever since he was a cadet at the West Texas Military School, and that it was her brothers who had dubbed him Bogey. She had learned also that this was Mr. Wade's first visit to Texas, and that Roberta was trying to impress him with it by marvelous tales, so that he would decide to spend the winter in San Antonio instead of going on to Mexico.

But if the conversation revealed little, the picture they made as they stood against the tropical background of palms and banana trees held many suggestions. Mary felt that she knew all about lieutenants, having met two at a Kentucky house-party where she had gone to be flower-girl at a wedding when she was only fourteen. Fashions evidently had not changed in lieutenants, since these looked as if they might have been taken out of the same box that furnished the first soldiers of her acquaintance; but the girls — there had been many changes in girls since she last saw any of this kind. It was eight months since she had left school at the end

"Mary Ware in Texas"

"What an adorable little curl"

of the Easter vacation, and none of the girls at Warwick Hall were doing their hair then as Roberta and the Major's daughter were doing theirs. Each had a very elaborate coiffure with a cluster of little short curls escaping to nestle against their white necks.

Her attention was especially called to this new style by Roberta's escort, whom Mary had classified in her mind as a "callow youth with a habit of making gallant little personal speeches."

When they first stepped into the court Roberta had thrown a white scarf about her, almost as light as thistledown, and glistening with crystal beads which spangled its soft meshes like dewdrops. As they turned to go it slipped from her shoulders, and Mr. Wade sprang forward to replace it. Drawing it around her shoulders he said with a melting glance at her dark hair, "What an adorable little curl!

"'Ringlet, O Ringlet, she blushed a rosy red,
When Ringlet, O Ringlet, she clipped you from her head!'"

Mary, who knew her Tennyson like her multiplication table, recalled the next lines,

"Ringlet, O Ringlet, she gave you me and said,
'Come kiss it, love, and put it by,
If this can change, why, so can I.'"

Roberta only laughed, not in the least impressed by his manner nor embarrassed by the inference of his quotation. Mary knew that she could not copy the curls, but she decided to try the rest of the coiffure in the morning. Not a single twist or wave had escaped her sharp eyes. In the darkness of her retreat, after they had gone, she put her hands to her head, rehearsing in pantomime each move she would have to make to produce the result she admired.

Suddenly her hands dropped and one clutched the railing, as the window shutters of the next room were thrown open with a bang and some one stepped out on to the balcony adjoining hers. The intruder was a large and elderly woman in a rustling black dress. The light from the room streaming out behind her showed that she was portly and gray-haired, and the way she peered through the vines, changing quickly from one view-point to another, showed that she was impatient.

When she turned, Mary saw that her dress, which was made to fasten in the back, was open from collar to belt, and she readily guessed the trouble. Forgetting that her presence was unknown to the anxious watcher, she leaned forward through the dark, saying politely, "Can I help you, Madam?"

If a hand had reached out and grabbed her, the old lady could not have been more startled. With a stifled shriek she backed up against the wall to hide her open bodice, and stood there limp and panting.

"Merciful *fathers!* how you scared me!" she breathed as Mary's face appeared in the full light. When she saw only a little school-girl of seventeen or thereabouts her relief found vent in a hysterical giggle. It shook her plump shoulders until they both started to laughing so hard that she could barely find voice to explain, or Mary to apologize.

"I just couldn't get my dress hooked up the back," she finally managed to say. "I rang half a dozen times for a chambermaid, but the ones on this floor all seem to be off duty this time of evening, and I won't ask a bell-boy as some of the ladies do. I don't think it's decent. So I just thought I'd look down into the court and see if I couldn't catch sight of James. He did it yesterday and I vowed I'd never ask him again. He's willing enough, but he kept me standing a solid half hour by the clock, and we were both tuckered out when he got through."

"Let me come and do it for you," said Mary

with her usual alacrity for following up promising beginnings.

"Oh, if you only would!" was the grateful answer. "I'll go in and unlock the door —"

Before she could finish her sentence Mary had climbed lightly over the railing which divided their balconies, and was following her into her room through the long windows that opened to the floor.

"Do you know," confided the old lady while Mary deftly fastened the hooks, "I think a hotel is the lonesomest place on the face of the globe for a woman. I come down here once a year or so with my husband, and he has a good time sitting around in the lobby smoking and making friends with stockmen like himself, but by the end of the second day I'm homesick for the ranch. Of course I enjoy the stores and the crowds on the street, and seeing all the finely dressed tourists at meal-times, but we've been down here three days now, and you're the first person I've spoken to besides the chambermaid and James. It's all right for strangers to keep themselves to themselves I suppose, but I must say it's a sort of strain when it comes to being the stranger yourself. I want somebody to neighbor with."

"So do I," responded Mary with such heartiness

that the old lady instantly expanded into warm friendliness. Before she was fairly fastened into her rustling black and purple gown she had confided to Mary that it was her very best one, and that it just wouldn't wear out, because it was too fine for church and she had no occasion to put it on save when she made her rare visits to San Antonio. The sleeves had been changed so many times to keep it in fashion, that her dressmaker had refused to alter it another time, even if the lace on it did cost five dollars a yard. James said why didn't she wear it at home and get done with it. But she told him much comfort a body would take around home in the tight gear a dressmaker boned you up in. But she'd have to do something, for full skirts were clear out now, and she felt like a balloon when other people were going around as slim and lank as starved snakes.

"It doesn't take long to get out of date," she added, "when you're living up in the hills in the back-woods."

"Oh, I know that," agreed Mary. "I've been living in a lonesome little spot out in Arizona for so long that I've nearly forgotten what civilization is like."

"You don't look like it," was the frank comment

as the still franker gaze of her listener travelled over her dress from top to bottom, noting every detail.

"Oh, this," answered Mary, as if the eyes had spoken. "This is a dress that I got in New York last Easter vacation. I was in school at Washington, but as I had to leave at the end of the term and go back home I've had no occasion to wear it since. That's why it looks so new."

"Now do sit down and tell me about it," urged her hostess hospitably. "I've always wanted to go to Washington."

She pushed forward a low rocker, and took the arm chair opposite with such a look of pleasurable anticipation on her kindly old face, that Mary obeyed. She knew how it felt to be fairly bursting with a sociability for which there was no outlet. She had experienced that same sensation a few minutes before when she watched Roberta and the Major's daughter go by with their friends. Besides, she felt a real liking for this companionable old lady who introduced herself as Mrs. Barnaby of Bauer, Texas. Mrs. James Barnaby.

"She's the real, comfortable, homey sort," thought Mary, who had been much given of late to classifying people. "She's like mission furni-

ture — plain and simple and genuine. She'd be her simple unpretentious self no matter what gilt and veneer she found herself among."

Mary was proud of her insight afterward when she learned more about Mrs. Barnaby's family. They had come out from Ohio over fifty years before when she was so young that she could barely remember the great prairie schooner that brought them. They had suffered all the hardships of the early Texas settlers, gone through the horrors of the Indian uprisings, and fought their way through with sturdy pioneer fortitude to the place where they could fold their hands and enjoy the comforts of the civilization they had helped to establish.

She told Mary little of this now, however, but led her on with many questions to talk of herself. Mrs. Barnaby had a lively curiosity and always took the most straightforward means to gratify it.

"She's interested in people, no matter who they are, just as I am," thought Mary, instantly recognizing the spirit which prompted the questions, and for that reason was led on to tell more than she would have told to most strangers. She did not take the world at large into her confidence now as she had done in her chatterbox days. In just a few moments Mrs. Barnaby had a very fair snap-

shot picture of the Ware family in her mind. Mary had given it very simply.

"I had gone from school at Warwick Hall to New York, to spend the Easter vacation with my sister Joyce. She's an artist and has her studio there. And we got word that my oldest brother, Jack, had been dreadfully hurt in an accident at the mines where he was manager—that it had made him a cripple for life. We all just adore Jack, so of course I packed up and went straight back to Arizona. It wasn't possible for Joyce to leave just then, and my brother Holland is in the navy, and of course he couldn't get away. Except the trained nurse there was nobody with mamma at the time but my youngest brother Norman, and as he is only fourteen I felt that I had to go."

"I hope he got better right away," interrupted Mrs. Barnaby eagerly.

"Yes, he did for awhile. He even got so that he could wheel himself around in his chair and go down to the office awhile every morning. But as soon as the cold weather set in he began to have such dreadful rheumatism that the doctor said the only thing to do was to take him to a milder climate. So we got ready right away and brought him down here."

"It must have been a hard trip for him," commented Mrs. Barnaby with a sympathetic shake of the head. "Arizona always did seem to me like the jumping-off place. I don't see how you managed it, him in a wheeled chair and so helpless."

"Oh, we came in a private car," Mary made haste to explain, "and Jack really enjoyed the trip. Waffles, the old colored cook on the car, you know, just laid himself out to please him, and the porter was so strong and helpful."

"H'm!" exclaimed her interested listener. "I've always thought I'd like to travel in a private car. It must be such a nice way to get over the country. But it isn't everybody that can afford it."

It was on the tip of Mary's honest little tongue to explain that it was not their car. They had come as guests of Mr. Robeson, one of the mine owners. But Mrs. Barnaby interrupted her with a question.

"Didn't you all go out in a big red automobile this afternoon? I've been trying to think ever since you came in here where it was I'd seen you before, and I believe it was with that party. There was a little lady in black and a boy and a rather heavy-set man with iron gray whiskers. I heard him giving orders to the chauffeur to go out to the missions."

"Yes," agreed Mary, "that was Mr. Robeson,

one of the owners of the mine. He's so fond of Jack and has been so lovely to all of us on his account. His valet stayed with Jack while we went out to see the town. He's going on to Mexico this afternoon."

Again she was on the point of saying that it was as Mr. Robeson's guests they had enjoyed the outing in the expensive car, but another question switched her off to another subject and left Mrs. Barnaby with the impression that the Wares were wealthy beyond computation. Mary had the manner of one always accustomed to luxury, and her easy way of referring to the studio in New York and the private car and the valet made one think she was born to purple and fine linen.

The impression was deepened later, when the Barnabys found themselves at the same table with Mary and Norman in the dining-room. "Mrs. Ware was having dinner in her rooms with Jack," Mary explained. He was sensitive about being wheeled into a public dining-room, so she and her mother would take turns staying with him.

With a brief glance at the menu card Mary ordered dinner for herself and brother before Mr. Barnaby had adjusted his glasses on his long nose and stumbled half-way through the menu. He

always read the bill of fare aloud to his wife, pronouncing the French words exactly as they were spelled, and they paused to discuss the nature of each unfamiliar dish with the amused waiter before ordering.

The ease with which Mary ordered gave further evidence to Mrs. Barnaby that the Wares had always been accustomed to sumptuous living, and to being "waited on, hand and foot." And it was proof to Mary that "James" was as genuine and primitive as his wife when he made no attempt to cover his ignorance of French menus. Looking up with a twinkle in his eyes he said to the waiter, "Just bring me the same as my wife ordered." Then he added with an odd one-sided smile that gave an irresistible expression of humor to his face, "I always take the blazed trail when there is one. It's a heap sight safer than striking out for yourself when you're in tall timber."

Evidently Mrs. Barnaby had told him all that she had learned of the Ware family, for he at once began making minute inquiries about Arizona and the mines, with the interest of a shrewd, genial old man who kept pace with the times and liked the companionship of young people. They were warm friends before the meal was over, and Mary hurried up-

stairs afterward, to report all she could remember to Jack. She had fallen into the habit of making the most of everything she saw and heard, for his entertainment.

She found him in his chair, out on the balcony with her mother, looking down on the same scene she had watched earlier in the evening. Mrs. Ware had just tucked a lap-robe around him and drawn a wrap over her own shoulders when Mary opened the door of the room behind them, and started across the floor to join them.

Some letters had been sent up while she was at dinner and seeing one on the table addressed to herself, she paused to read it before joining them. It was just a note from one of the girls at Warwick Hall, who, knowing Mary's fondness for the beautiful old garden there, always enclosed some leaf or flower from it every time she wrote. This time several violets fell out, withered but still sweet. As Mary stooped to pick them up she heard Jack say in a voice so full of hearty enjoyment that she scarcely recognized it for his: "This certainly is great! What a world of things we've been missing all these years, little mother! I never realized just how much we have missed till I went East last year. Then afterwards the days were so full of

work and the new responsibilities that I didn't have time to think about it much. But I can see now what a dull gray existence *you've* had, for as far back as I can remember there's only been three backgrounds for you: a little Kansas village, a tent on the edge of the Arizona desert, and a lonely mining camp. How long has it been since you've seen a sight like this?"

The scattered violets were all picked up now, but Mary still stood by the table, waiting for her mother's reply.

"It's so long ago I'll have to stop and count up. Let me see. You're twenty-two and Joyce twenty-three — really it's almost a quarter of a century since I've been in a large city, and seen anything like this in the way of illuminations, with music and crowds. Your father took me to New York the winter after we were married. Before that I'd always had my full share. I'd visited a great deal and travelled with Cousin Kate and her father. And I'm sure that no one could want anything brighter and sweeter and more complete than life as I found it as a girl, in 'my old Kentucky home.' As I had so much more than most people the first part of my life I couldn't complain when I had less afterwards. But I certainly do enjoy this," she

added earnestly, as the orchestra began the haunting air of the Mexican "Swallow Song," *La Golondrina,* and the odor of roses stole up from below. The court was filled now with gay little groups of people who had the air of finding life one continual holiday.

The cheeriness of the reply almost brought tears to Mary's eyes, as she realized for the first time how much more than any of them her mother must have suffered from the hardships of their early poverty, because it was in such sharp contrast to what she had known before. To hide the little quiver that wanted to creep into her voice Mary laughed as she joined them, dragging a chair through the French window after her.

"Here you sit like two comfortable cats in the lap of luxury," she said. "You'll begin to purr soon."

"That's exactly what we're doing now," answered Jack. "We're congratulating ourselves on being in this land of summer with every comfort at hand and a free show to entertain us. This is as good as being in a box-party at the opera."

Mary settled herself with her chair tipped back on its rockers, and looked down on the court below. "I wish we could stay at this hotel all winter," she

exclaimed. "I wish we could be as rich all the time as I feel to-night. Ever since we started South in Mr. Robeson's car I've felt as opulent and as elegant as if we owned the earth, and I've noticed that you and mamma take to luxury quite as readily as I do — like ducks to water. Norman is learning fast, too, for one of his opportunities. He's having the time of his life now, down in the lobby, just 'seein' things at night.' He asked me for a quarter when I left him, to get some post-cards of the Alamo and the plaza to send home."

"Well?" queried Jask as she paused. Mary had had the family finances in hand since his illness, and her economical clutch had earned her the title of "Watch-dog of the Treasury."

"Oh, I gave it to him," she answered. "Gave it with a lordly sweep of the hand, as if bestowing millions were a daily habit of mine. But to-morrow it will be a different story. To-morrow a copper cent may be too great a boon for my family to ask me to part with. To-morrow we go house-hunting, with the sad realization that we're all as poor as Job's old blue turkey hen."

"What's the odds so long as you're happy," quoted Jack. There was a long pause in which they listened to the music, each enjoying to the fullest

the novelty of being in such a place. Then Jack asked, "Didn't you have any adventures down in the dining-room? We rather expected that you'd have a series of them to report."

"Mercy, yes! I've had half a dozen since I saw you last, very mild ones though. I've seen some most interesting people, a major's daughter and a lieutenant from the Post, called Bogey, and I overheard the beginning of a romance, a most sentimental request for an 'adorable little curl,' and I've hooked Mrs. James Barnaby of Bauer, Texas, up in her best black and purple gown, and James himself has invited me to take 'pot luck' with them up at the Barnaby ranch any time I choose to go. He's a dear and so is she, and if you'd only —"

Her chatter was stopped by a sudden exclamation from Jack, and following his gaze into the court below she saw two of the group in which she had been so interested earlier in the evening.

"That's the lieutenant I told you about!" she exclaimed excitedly. "That's Bogey, and the other is the major's daughter. I don't wonder that you're stunned at the sight of a pretty girl like that when it's been such ages since you have seen one."

"I'm stunned because it happens to be a girl I

know," exclaimed Jack in a tone almost as excited as her own. "That's Gay Melville, and I met her at The Locusts the night I stopped in Lloydsboro Valley with the Shermans."

"Are you sure?" gasped Mary.

"Dead sure! She played the violin that evening, and you can't take your eyes off her face when she plays, it's so sweet, and you could never forget it after you'd watched her through one performance. Then her hair — there's no mistaking *that,* and that little trick of lifting her chin. Besides, it's no surprising matter to see her. She lives here and she's a popular girl."

"Oh, I know it!" exclaimed Mary, "and I've known all the time that her home is in San Antonio. Haven't I heard the Warwick Hall seniors talk of her by the hour? But somehow I never put two and two together and got it through my head that we're in the same town. Really I'd forgotten her in the excitement of our sudden coming. But now it just takes me off my feet to know that we're under the same roof, and to remember that she lived a whole summer in Lloydsboro Valley and is such a dear friend of the Little Colonel and Betty. Why, we're *bound* to meet her some time this winter. Oh, I know we're going to have a good time

here, and I think that San Antonio is just the dearest, most charming old place in the world."

"It is certainly a good place to be to-night," answered Jack, following with intent gaze the vanishing figure of the major's pretty daughter. "And to-morrow —"

He did not finish the sentence, for the violins were throbbing through that last refrain of *La Golondrina* so softly and sweetly that he did not want to lose a note. When it was done Mary took up his last word, quoting with a dramatic sweep of the hand, "To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day!"

CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF A HOME

It was with the vision of a charming little bungalow in her mind that Mary started on her search for a house next morning; a little white bungalow half hidden in vines, and set among heuisach and mesquite trees, or maybe in the shelter of one giant pecan. As they had whirled around the city in the touring car the day before, she had seen several of that kind which she thought would suit both their taste and their purse.

She had not yet reached the point of picturing to herself the inside furnishings. They would have to be of the simplest sort, of course. But one picture seemed to rise up of its own accord whenever she thought of the new home. She saw a big living-room, the centre of a cheery hospitality, where girls fluttered in and out at all hours of the day. Bright, fun-loving, interesting girls like Gay Melville and Roberta. Her wistful little face grew very sweet and eager at the mere thought of such

companionship, and there was such a dancing light in her gray eyes and such a happy glow of expectancy on her cheeks that more than one passer-by took a second glance and felt the morning brighter because of it.

Mrs. Ware had expected to accompany her, leaving Jack to Norman's care for the morning, but a neuralgic headache, an old enemy of hers, seized her on awakening, and she was obliged to shift the responsibility to Mary's willing shoulders. Although it doubled the car-fare, Mary took Norman with her for company. Armed with a map of the city and a list of houses, clipped from the morning paper, they started gaily out on their quest. It was good just to be alive on such a morning, and out in the brilliant sunshine, with the air so fresh and sweet, and the plaza as green and flowery as if it were mid-summer instead of the week before Thanksgiving.

They walked at first, wanting a closer view than the cars afforded of the fascinating old curio shops. Mexicans were no novelty to them as they were to Northern tourists. They had seen too many in Phoenix and at the mining camp to care for a second look at the tall, peaked hats of the men or the rebosa-draped heads of the women. But the

narrow streets of the Mexican quarter with their chili and tamale stands interested them. It was some kind of a fête day, and flags were flying and a festive spirit was in the air; a spirit that seems to belong peculiarly to this alluring old Spanish city, where fête days come often and one soon learns to say "mañana" with the rest.

Norman, who picked up bits of information here and there as a magnet draws needles and nails, imparted some of it to Mary as he trudged along beside her. Everything was making a deep impression on his mind because this was his first journey of any consequence.

"This is the third oldest city in the United States, the guide book says," he began, then paused before a shop window, attracted by the sign, "Dressed Fleas, 35 cents," to exclaim, scornfully, "Who'd be fool enough to want one of *those* things, dead or alive!" With a skip or two to catch up with Mary, he continued, "And there's thirteen miles of river twisting in and out among the streets, with seventeen bridges over it."

"It surely is the twistiest, crookedest river that I ever saw on a map," answered Mary, "but that's what makes the town so lovely — all those graceful bends with the green banks and tropical foliage

and the little boats tied up here and there to the landings. I wish we could find the kind of a place we want somewhere along the river. Maybe we could manage to get a boat. Anyhow, if we couldn't do any better we could make a raft. I'd love to pole one, and it would be just like doing it in our own back yard if the river ran right behind our place."

"Say! Let's!" exclaimed Norman, explosively. "Mary Ware, you've got a head on you that's worth something! And I'll tell you something else I wish we could manage to do, — that's to get a house out near Brackenridge park. They've got antelope and buffalo and elk, and all sorts of wild animals out there. I'd like to see them often."

"We'd better get down to business, then," said Mary, "instead of loitering along this way. We can look at the shops after we've found a house."

"Stop just a minute at the Alamo," begged Norman. "I want to see the place where Travis and Davy Crockett and Bowie put up such a desperate fight against Santa Anna. This is just as interesting a place to me as Bunker Hill or Plymouth Rock would be, and I want to write home to Billy Downs about it."

"But it isn't the *exact* spot," objected Mary, who wanted to lose no more time and was sometimes provokingly literal. "This is only the little chapel, and the real fight took place in a court that was away over yonder, and the walls were pulled down long ago."

Norman planted himself at the entrance and proceeded to argue the matter. "But the chapel was part of it, and it stands for the whole thing now — a sort of monument, you know, and there's relics inside and — "

"Oh, well, come on, then," said Mary, "if you're *that* anxious, but just for a minute. You can come here some other time by yourself and prowl around all day."

She followed him into the dim interior, still insisting at every step that they must hurry. It was so early no one but the care-taker was in sight. She knew how Norman liked history, and what enthusiastic admiration he had for the heroes of frontier times, but she was surprised to see how deeply he was impressed by the venerable building. He took off his hat as they entered and walked around as reverently as if they were in a church. As they gazed up at the narrow, iron-barred windows which had witnessed such a desperate struggle for liberty,

he said, in an awed tone, which made even Mary feel solemn:

"'Here, for ten days, took place the most memorable, thrilling, tragic, and bloody siege in American history. One hundred and seventy-nine indomitable American frontier riflemen against an army of six thousand brave and disciplined troops led by veteran officers!'"

"*Where* did you get all that?" demanded Mary, in surprise.

"I saw it in a little pamphlet, in the reading-room last night, and it told about the Comanche Indians that came here about seventy years ago. The fiercest fighting you ever heard of — thirty-two Indian warriors killed right out there in the street that we came across just now, and seven Texans."

"Goodness, Norman!" she answered, with a shrug. "What do you want to resurrect all those old horrors for? It doesn't make the place any more attractive to me to know that its streets once ran red with blood. I'd rather think of them as they will be in the Spring on San Jacinto Day, red with roses after the Battle of Flowers. Think of our being here to see that!" she added, exultingly.

As they emerged from the dimly-lighted chapel into the blinding sunshine of the street, Norman

remarked thoughtfully, "Of course I'm sorry that Jack had the rheumatism so badly that he had to get out of Lone Rock, but as long as we did have to leave home, I'm jolly glad it brought us to San Antonio. Think of the times we'll have going out to Fort Sam Houston to guard-mounts and parade. It's something just to be within walking distance of the largest army post of the United States."

"I'm thinking of the public library," was her rejoinder. "Jack can have all the books he wants to read this winter; and I'm thinking of the friends we'll have; the real, satisfying kind, that do things, and go places, and think, and keep you from sinking to the level of a cabbage. I've always wanted to live in the thick of things, and here we are at last!"

They paused on the curb to wait for a long string of vehicles to pass. An army ambulance came first, drawn by sleek mules, driven by a soldier in khaki and carrying several ladies and children from the Post. Close behind it came a riding party, clattering in on horseback from a breakfast at the Country Club. Then followed close on each other's heels, a dilapidated prairie schooner, three boys on a burro, a huckster's wagon, and a carriage with liveried coachman and

prancing, thoroughbred horses. The clang of a long line of electric cars whizzing past, the honk of many automobiles, and the warning sound of bicycle bells, as their owners wheeled in and out through the bewildering maze of vehicles and pedestrians, made Norman exclaim, joyfully, "Gee! I'm glad we're out of Lone Rock! There's something to see here every single minute."

Mary signalled a passing car, and as soon as they were seated, drew out her newspaper clippings. "Mrs. Barnaby said for us to go to Laurel Heights first," she remarked, "so I believe we'll find it best to try this one. It sounds all right."

She read the advertisement aloud: "A five-room bungalow, never been occupied, all modern conveniences, one block from car-line, rent reasonable, inquire next door."

Then she unfolded the map and studied it as they whirled along, now and then repeating the name of a street as she came across one which sounded particularly pleasing and story-bookish, as she called it, to Norman: "King William Street, Mistletoe Avenue, Dolorosa and San Pedro."

When a little later they alighted from the car and found the place described in the advertisement, it was almost the bungalow of Mary's dreams.

The vines were lacking and the lawn was still strewn with the débris of building, but that could soon be remedied.

"What good, wide porches to hang a hammock on!" exclaimed Norman, as they mounted the steps and walked around, peering through the windows.

"You'll have to say gallery," corrected Mary. "Everybody down here calls a porch a gallery. They won't know what you mean."

They walked all around the house, exclaiming over each attractive feature, as each window revealed a new one. The electric lights, the convenient little bathroom, the open fire-place in the living-room, the built-in china closet. Norman's only complaint was that the house was nowhere near the river. That was a drawback in Mary's eyes also, for ever since they had thought of a boat it had begun to take its place in that mental picture in which those alluring girls were always fluttering in and out.

"Of course we'll look farther," she said. "It wouldn't do to take the first one we came to when there are so many to choose from. I'll just run in next door and inquire the price, and tell them we'll make up our minds later."

But when she had made her inquiries her decision

followed immediately. What might seem reasonable rent to the owner and to the people of that neighborhood was entirely out of the reach of the Ware pocket-book. "You won't find anything cheaper in this part of town," the woman assured her, and after several more experiences of the same kind, Mary believed her.

They passed all sorts of beautiful homes in their wanderings; stately Colonial mansions, comfortable wide-spreading houses with broad galleries and hospitable doors, picturesque bungalows in the mission style, little white-winged cottages over-run with tangles of Maréchal Niel roses, their fragrant buds swinging from the very eaves. The farther they searched the more Mary longed to find a home among them, and it was with a feeling of deep disappointment that she turned back to the hotel for lunch.

Mrs. Ware had spent part of the morning telephoning to different real estate offices recommended by Mr. Barnaby, and had a small list of houses sifted down from those offered her.

"They tell me we are too late to get much of a choice," she reported. "People have been pouring into the city for a month, and the freight stations and ware-houses are piled up with household goods.

It is this way every fall, they say. No matter how many homes they build there are always more families clamoring to occupy them than can be accommodated. It would be easier for us to find one if we could afford to pay more, but I had to cut out all the high-priced ones from the lists that they gave me."

Mary took the slip of paper from her mother, saying, "So far the ones we have seen have been too big or too expensive, or else far too small. I wonder what will be the matter with these?"

She began to find out almost as soon as she and Norman resumed their search again after lunch. The lists they had led them into older parts of the town, where the rented houses had seen several generations of transitory occupants. Some of the places they visited made her shrink back in dismay. A long procession of careless tenants had passed through, each leaving some contribution to the evidences of their slack housekeeping. Nearly every family had had its share of disease and death, and Mary hurried away with a wry face and the single exclamation, "germs!" Mrs. Barnaby had spoken of that class of houses. "You want to be careful," she told her. "Even the nicest looking may have had dreadfully sick tenants in them, and although

there is a law requiring landlords to fumigate, and all that sort of thing, you can't be sure that it has been done as thoroughly as it should."

"This is getting monotonous," Mary exclaimed, wearily, when they had walked block after block to no purpose, and the end of the day found them with nothing accomplished. The morning freshness of the atmosphere had given place to such enervating heat that she had been carrying her coat on her arm for several hours. The sky was overcast with clouds, when fagged and inwardly cross she climbed on the car that was to take them back to the hotel, vowing that she couldn't drag herself another step.

At the next corner half a dozen people hurried down the street, waving frantically for the car to wait. As they crowded into the aisle, laughing and out of breath, Mary heard a lady exclaim, "We certainly were lucky to catch this car. If we'd had to wait for the next one the 'Norther' surely would have caught us, and this is going to be a nasty, wet one, too."

Even as she spoke there was a sense of sudden chill in the air. A cold gale swept down the street, setting flags and awnings to flapping, and blinding pedestrians with whirling clouds of dust. The con-

ductor hurried to close the car windows, and the passengers began struggling into their wraps.

The sudden freshening of the air had such a bracing effect that Mary straightened up, feeling that after all she might be able to walk the half block from the car to the hotel. When the time came, she found that she could even run the distance, for the few big drops of rain that splashed in her face were the fore-runner of a downpour, and they had no umbrella. Just as they reached the entrance such a mighty deluge began that Mary's disappointment in house-hunting was somewhat softened by the fact that her beloved hat had escaped a wetting which must have ruined it.

"Never mind, little Vicar," said Jack, consolingly, when she had made her report to the assembled family. "The proverbial turn in our fortune is bound to come. It's never failed us yet, you know."

"But we've simply got to get out of this expensive hotel," she answered, desperately. "Do you realize that we could keep house for a week on what it costs the four of us to stay here just one day?"

Mrs. Ware broke the long silence that followed, by suggesting, "Maybe for the present we'd bet-

ter try to get a few rooms somewhere, just for light housekeeping. It's a last resort, I know, but Mary is right. Every day we spend here is taking a big mouthful out of our little capital."

Nobody liked the suggestion, for whatever else they had lacked in their Arizona homes there had been no lack of space, but they all saw the wisdom of Mrs. Ware's suggestion, and agreed to try it until they could look around and do better.

"How lovely it must be to have an ancestral roof-tree," thought Mary that night, as she tossed, restlessly, kept awake by the noises of the big hotel. "I can't think of anything more heavenly than to always live in the house where you were born, and your fathers and grandfathers before you, as the Lloyds do at The Locusts. It must be so delightful to feel that you've got an attic full of heirlooms and that everything about the place is connected with some old family tradition, and to know that you can take root there, and not have to go wandering around from pillar to post as we Wares have always had to do. I wonder if Lloyd Sherman knows how much she has to be thankful for!"

Next day in her shortest skirt and rain-coat, and under a dripping umbrella, Mary started to look

for rooms. She was alone this time. Company was too expensive a luxury to afford more than one day, since it meant extra car-fare. She paddled blithely off, however, never minding the weather. This rain made the little home she was seeking seem all the more desirable. Whenever a window showed her a cozy interior with the light of an open fire shining cheerily over it, she thought it would not be long till she would be making afternoon tea over just such a fire, or popping corn or toasting marsh-mallows. She could think of a dozen ways to make it attractive for the girls when they dropped in of rainy afternoons.

Occupied with such plans she tramped along through the mud and slush as happily as she had gone through the sunshine the day before. But by the end of the morning repeated failures began to bring a worried line between her eyes and a sharp note of anxiety into her voice when she made her inquiries. Once, finding herself in the neighborhood of a house which she had refused the day before because it did not quite measure up to the standards she had set, she went to look at it again, thinking, after all, they might manage to be more comfortable in it than in a few rooms. To her disappointment she found a family already moving

in. It had been rented almost immediately after her refusal to take it.

In her search for rooms a new difficulty faced her. Invariably one of the first questions asked her was, "Anyone sick in your family?"

"Yes, my brother," she would say. "He has rheumatism. That is why we are particular about getting a sunny south room for him."

"Well, we can't take sick people," would be the positive answer, and she would turn away with an ache in her throat and a dull wonder why Jack's rheumatism could make him objectionable in the slightest degree as a tenant. The morning was nearly gone before she found the reason. She was shown into a dingy parlor by a child of the family, and asked to wait a few moments. Its mother had gone around the corner to the bakery, but would be right back.

There were two others already waiting when Mary entered the room, a stout, middle-aged woman and a delicate-looking girl. The woman looked up with a nod as Mary took a chair near the stove and spread out her damp skirts to dry.

"I reckon you're on the same errand as us," said the woman, "but it's first come, first served, and we're ahead of you."

"Yes," answered Mary, distantly polite, and wondering at the aggressive tone. When the child left the room the woman rose and shut the door behind it, and then came back to Mary, lowering her voice confidentially.

"It's just this way. We're getting desperate. We came down here for my daughter's health — the doctor sent us, and we've gone all over town trying to get some kind of roof over our heads. We can't get in anywhere because Maudie has lung trouble. People have been coming down here for forty years to get cured of it, and folks were glad enough to rent 'em rooms and take their money, till all this talk was stirred up in the papers about lung trouble being a great white plague, and catching, and all that. Now you can't get in anywhere at a price that poor folks can pay. I've come to the end of my rope. The landlady at the boarding-house where we've been stopping, told me this morning that she couldn't keep us another day, because the boarders complained when they found what ailed Maudie. I was a fool to tell 'em, for she doesn't cough much. It's only in the first stages. After this I'm just going to say that I came down here to look for work, and goodness knows, *that's* the truth! What I want to ask of you is that you

won't stand in the way of our getting in here by offering more rent or anything like that."

"Certainly not," Mary answered, drawing back a little, almost intimidated by the fierceness which desperation gave to the other's manner.

The landlady bustled in at that moment, and as she threw the rooms open for inspection, she asked the question that Mary had heard so often that morning, — "Any sick in your family?"

"No," answered the woman, glibly. I'm down in the city looking for work. I do plain sewing, and if you know of any likely customers I'd be glad if you'd mention me."

The landlady glanced shrewdly at Maudie, who kept in the background.

"She does embroidery," explained her mother. "Needle-work makes her a little pale and peaked, sitting over it so long. I ain't going to let her do so much after I once get a good start."

"Well, a person in my place can't be too careful," complained the landlady. "We get taken in so often letting our rooms to strangers. They have all sorts of names for lung trouble nowadays, malaria and a weak heart and such things. The couple I had in here last said it was just indigestion and shortness of breath, but she died all the same

six weeks later, in this very room, and he had to acknowledge it was her lungs all the time, and he knew it."

Mary looked around the room with a shiver. Its old wallpaper, dingy paint and worn carpet proclaimed too plainly that its renovation since the last lodgers' departure had been only a superficial one, barely what the law demanded.

"No, thank you," she replied to the landlady, who had turned to her with the hope of finding a more desirable tenant. "I couldn't consider these rooms at all. There are only two, and we need three at least."

Out on the street again a tear or two splashed down and mingled with the rain on her face as she walked away. She was growing desperate herself. If two rooms had been all they needed, she could have found them a number of times over. Or, if they could have afforded some of the flats or the sunny suites she discovered on pleasant streets, her search would have been soon over. But it was the same old circle she kept coming back to. When the rooms were large enough and within their means, either they were unsanitary or the owners objected to invalids. In vain she explained that Jack's helplessness was due to an accident, and that

rheumatism is not contagious. Too many people like Maudie's mother had been ahead of her and bred suspicion of all strangers in quest of rooms for light housekeeping.

Mary had told her mother not to expect her back for lunch. She would go into some tea-room or restaurant wherever she happened to be. But one o'clock found her in a part of the town where nothing of the kind was in sight. She bought an apple and some crackers at a grocery, and ate them under cover of her umbrella while she stood on a corner, waiting for a car to take her to another part of the city.

What a different place it seemed to be from the one they had seen the day of their arrival! Then it was a world of hospitable homes and sunshine and kindly faces. The very shop windows looked friendly and inviting. Now, plodding along in the wet, to the tired, homesick girl it seemed only a great, desolate place full of lonely, discouraged strangers and sick people and dingy boarding-houses, whose doors shut coldly in anxious faces.

All afternoon she kept up the search. The electric lights were beginning to gleam through the rain, throwing long, quivering reflections in the puddles

when she finally turned back to the hotel, bedraggled and utterly discouraged.

"I *won't* cry!" she said, fiercely, to herself. "I can't! For Jack would see that I had been at it, and he is getting so sensitive lately. It would hurt him dreadfully to know that we are barred out of all the desirable places because he is an invalid."

The habit of years is strong. Mary had persisted so long in applying the good Vicar of Wakefield's motto to her childish difficulties and disappointments, that it had taught her remarkable self-control. Instead of bursting impulsively into the room as so many girls of her age would have done, and giving vent to her over-taxed nerves and discouragement in a tearful report of the day's adventures, she walked slowly from the elevator to her room, trying to think of some careless way in which to announce her failure. She paused with her hand on the knob, thinking, "I'll just tell them that I've come back like Noah's dove did the first time it was sent out from the ark, because I could find no rest for the sole of my foot; at least a rest which fitted both our ideas and our income."

To her relief, the room was empty when she entered. The only light streamed through the tran-

som and keyhole from Jack's room, where a low murmur told that her mother was reading aloud. Opening the door just a crack so that her face was not visible, she called, gaily, "I'm back, mamma, but you can just go on with your reading; I'll not tell a single thing till I'm all dried and dressed. I'm as wet as a frog."

"Oh, I was afraid you'd be," came the anxious answer. "I'll come and get —"

"No," interrupted Mary, decidedly. "I don't want anything but time. Closing the door between the rooms, she switched on the light and began slipping out of her wet clothes into dry ones. In a moment or two she was in her soft, warm kimona and Turkish slippers, standing on the threshold of the bathroom, intending to plunge her face into a basin of hot water. It was the best thing she could think of to remove the traces of tears, and she was so tired that now she was safe in the harbor of her own room the tears *would* come, no matter how hard she tried to keep them back.

But before she could turn the faucet, a tap at the hall door made her dab her handkerchief hastily across her eyes, for Mrs. Barnaby's voice followed the tap.

"I surely hate to trouble you," she began, apolo-

getically, as soon as Mary had admitted her, "but if you could only hook me up this one more time — I've been waiting for James with this shawl over my shoulders for nearly half an hour. Then I heard you come in and I thought maybe you wouldn't mind doing it once more. We're going home in the morning."

Then with a keen look into Mary's face, she added, kindly, "Why, you poor child, what's the matter? Your brother isn't worse, I hope!"

There was such a note of real concern in the sympathetic voice that Mary's lip trembled and her eyes brimmed over again. When the next moment she found herself drawn into Mrs. Barnaby's capacious embrace with a plump hand patting her soothingly on the back, the story of her discouragement seemed to sob itself out of its own accord. The performance left Mary's eyes very red and tear-swollen, but the outburst brought such relief that she could laugh the moment it was over. It was Mrs. Barnaby's surprise which brought the laugh.

"I can't get over it!" she kept exclaiming. "To think that all this time I supposed that you were enormously wealthy — actually rolling in riches! Well, well!"

"I didn't know that my 'short and simple annals of the poor' would be so upsetting," giggled Mary, hysterically. "You were so sweet and sympathetic I couldn't help telling you. But don't take it to heart, please. We Wares never stay discouraged long. I'll be all right now after I get my face washed. As soon as I fasten your dress I'll run in and turn on the hot water."

The hooking proceeded in silence, Mrs. Barnaby so absorbed in thought that she forgot her usual sigh of relief and expression of thanks at the end. Instead she said, abruptly, "You come and go up on the train with us in the morning to Bauer. It's only thirty miles from here and it's up in the hills, high and dry, and there's the Metz cottage I'm sure you can get, all freshly scrubbed and ready to move into. Mrs. Metz is the cleanest little German woman you ever saw, — scrubs even the under sides of her tables as white as the tops. It wasn't rented when we came down here last Saturday. Let me talk to your mother about it. I'm sure it is just the place for you."

"Oh, no," began Mary. "We couldn't possibly go there! We've counted so much on living here in San Antonio this winter and meeting some of our friends' friends — "

Then she stopped with a little gasp, and after an instant's pause said, apologetically, "I didn't mean to refuse so abruptly, and now I take it all back. Changing plans so suddenly is somewhat of a shock to one's system, isn't it! After all, I'm like a drowning man catching at straws, and I'd be very glad, indeed, if you would talk to mamma about it. You can go right in now while I finish dressing, if you like."

It was not the first time Mrs. Barnaby had been ushered into Jack's room. Their acquaintance had begun over the railing of their adjoining balconies the first day of Mary's house-hunting, and had rapidly deepened into a mutual liking. So strongly had Mrs. Barnaby been attracted to the young fellow who bore his crippled condition so lightly that he made others forget it, that she induced James to go in and make his acquaintance also. The two men had spent several hours of the long, rainy morning together, each greatly interested in the other's conversation.

Mary, who had been gone all day, did not know of this, but she knew that her mother had met and liked Mrs. Barnaby, and that the story of the day's unsuccessful search would not sound half so serious if that cheerful old lady told it, especially if it

were followed immediately by her offer to find them a home in Bauer.

Bauer was an uncharted country on Mary's map, but if Mrs. Barnaby thought of it as their desired haven, she could trust her capable hands to take them safely into it. So it was with a sigh of relief that she opened the door between the rooms, saying, "Here's Mrs. Barnaby, mamma," and left her to make explanations while she finished dressing.

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE TOWN OF BAUER

MARY was the only one to whom the change of plans made a vital difference. She had built such lovely dream-castles of their winter in San Antonio that it was hard to see them destroyed at one breath.

"Of course it's the only thing to do," she said, in a mournful aside to Norman, "but did you ever dream that there was a dish of rare, delicious fruit set down in front of you, so tempting that you could hardly wait to taste it, and just as you put out your hand it was suddenly snatched away? That's the way I feel about leaving here. And I've dreamed of getting letters, too; big, fat letters, that were somehow going to change my whole life for the better, and then just as I started to read them I always woke up, and so never found out the secret that would make such a change in my fortunes."

"Maybe it won't be so bad after all," encouraged Norman. "Maybe we can have a boat. There's a creek running through the town and the Barnaby ranch is only seven miles out in the country. We'll see them often."

Mary wanted to wail out, "Oh, it isn't boats, and ranches, and old people I want! It's girls, and boys, and something doing! Being in the heart of things, as we would be if we could only stay here in this beautiful old city!"

The wail found no voice, however, for even in the midst of her disappointment Mary remembered Jack, and could not let him feel that this change in their plans meant any sacrifice for her. Besides, she had to acknowledge that the creek and the ranch *did* hold out some compensations, and she was deeply grateful to these two kind old people who had come to their rescue in such cordial, neighborly fashion. Mr. Barnaby had been called into the family council also, and had spent the evening with them discussing prices and prospects.

Even Norman was impressed by their offers of assistance, and spoke of it as he sat slowly unlacing his shoes after they had gone. Mary was in the next room, repacking her trunk, for it had been decided that she and Norman were to go

to Bauer on the early accommodation train when the Barnabys left for home. The door between the rooms was still open, and she heard him say, thoughtfully:

"What do you suppose makes them so rattling good to us when we're just strangers?"

Jack laughed and quoted, teasingly:

"'What makes the lamb love Mary so?'
The eager children cry.
'Oh, Mary loves the lamb, you know,'
The teacher did reply."

"Aw, talk sense!" was Norman's disgusted answer. "I don't know what you mean by that."

An understanding smile flashed between Jack and his mother, who had stayed to help him prepare for the night, and she answered for him.

"Jack only means that we get just what we give in this world, dear. From the days of Solomon it's been a proverb that the man who would have friends 'must show himself friendly.' And that's what you and Mary did the first night you met the Barnabys. You made them feel that you found them genuinely interesting, and that awakened a liking for you."

"But anybody'd find that old man interesting," Norman explained, gravely. "You never heard

such Indian stories as he can tell, — true ones that he's been in himself, — and hunting — Gee! you ought to hear him! I bid to sit next to him going up on the train."

"You're welcome to him!" called Mary. "I'll take Mrs. B." Then she came to the doorway, a pile of folded garments in her hands. "I declare, she's just an old dear! She's thought of so many ways to save us expense since she found out that we have to economize. She even offered to have our two extra trunks checked on their tickets. They only brought suit-cases. So we'll have no extra baggage to pay for."

The sun was shining next morning, and although the chill of the Norther was still in the air, the rain-washed plazas were greener than ever, and new roses were opening to take the places of the old ones that the storm had beaten off the day before. Mary's spirits seemed to have passed through the same freshening process, for there was no trace of tears or regrets on the bright face that greeted her travelling companions.

The only morning train was an accommodation, which carried much freight and took its own time for the journey. This happened to be a day when it was four hours on the road, but none of the

little party felt that time dragged. Ordinarily, Mary would have enjoyed keeping close to the old ranchman, as Norman did, hopping off the car every time they stopped on a side-track, to investigate everything along the way, — the lime works, the rock quarry, the station where the mail was put off for the soldiers who were camped at the Government reservation for target practise. Even the little oil-burning engine would have been of as much interest to her as it was to Norman, had she not been so busily occupied otherwise.

As they wound higher and higher into the hills she looked out now and then with a quick exclamation of pleasure at the view, but for the most part she was "visiting" with Mrs. Barnaby, as that good soul expressed it. Their acquaintance took long strides forward that morning. Part of the time Mary chattered along just as if her listener had been one of the Warwick Hall girls, and part of the time she listened to elderly views and confidences with the seeming sympathy of middle age. A bit of personal history from one called out a corresponding scrap from the other, and they had exchanged views on many subjects, ranging from young turkeys to unhappy marriages, when the

porter passed through the train calling, "Bauer! All out for Bauer!"

Mrs. Barnaby glanced out the window, saying in surprise, "I had no idea we were so near home!" Then she gave Mary's sleeve an affectionate little pat with her plump hand, exclaiming cordially, "I declare, it's been a real treat to have you along." And Mary, as she helped Mrs. Barnaby struggle into her coat, responded, "Well, I've enjoyed every inch of the way. Somehow you make me feel that you're just my age or I'm just yours, — I don't know which. You can't imagine how 'little and lorn' I feel at the thought of leaving you."

"Oh, but I'm not going to leave you until you're safely settled," was the comforting assurance. "James has some business at the court-house that will keep him in town for an hour or so. As soon as we drop him there I'll drive around with you to make arrangements about the cottage. There's Pedro now."

They were on the platform by this time, and she indicated by a nod the slim young Mexican who had driven the carriage from the ranch to meet them. It was a roomy, old-fashioned carriage drawn by two big gray mules, with much shining nickel-plating on their stout black harness. The

station was half a mile away from the village, and as they swung down the sunny white road towards it, at a rapid gait, both Norman and Mary looked out eagerly at the place that was to be their home for a whole long winter, and maybe more.

From a distance it looked almost like a toy village, with its red roofs, blue barns and flashing windmills nestled against the background of misty hills. Low mountain peaks rose here and there on the far horizon beyond.

"This is distinctly a German village, you know," explained Mrs. Barnaby, as they passed a group of little flaxen-haired Teutons on the roadside, who were calling to each other and their dog in a tongue which Mary could not understand.

"Bauer was settled by an old German count and a baron or two, who came over here with their families and followers. They made it as much like a corner of the Fatherland as they could, and their descendants still cling to their language and customs. They don't want any disturbing, aggressive Americans in their midst, so they never call on new-comers, and never return their visits if any of them try to make the advances. They will welcome you to their shops, but not to their homes. Even the English and Scotch people who

have owned the out-lying ranches as long as they have owned the town are looked upon as aliens and strangers, in a way."

Mary gave an exclamation of dismay. "Texas certainly is full of surprises," she said, in a disappointed tone. "One thinks of it as being young and crude, and with the proverbial hospitality of a new country. I've always thought of it as having the latch-string out for everybody."

"Oh, *Texas* has," Mrs. Barnaby hastened to assure her. "Its doors are wide open, and its welcome corresponds to its size, the biggest in the Union. But Bauer is different. It has a few families who will not look on you with suspicion. The old couple who own the cottage which I hope to get for you will be good neighbors, and if you were to live here a long time there are others who would be friendly. Then there are several American families who have found a foothold in the town, and as I said, English-speaking people on the ranches hereabout. They are cultured, refined people, interesting to know, but strangers coming here rarely make their acquaintance. You see we have so many transients coming for their health, staying just a few weeks or months and going on again — it's hardly to be expected we'd — "

"Mary Ware in Texas —
"A dashing girl in khaki and a cowboy hat
astride of a fiery little mustang"

Her sentence was interrupted by a dashing girl in khaki and a cowboy hat, astride a fiery little mustang. She rode past the carriage, calling out a greeting as she passed. Norman turned around exclaiming, "Did you see that? A cartridge belt around her waist and a six-shooter in her holster! That's the wild West for you."

"That's the sheriff's daughter," explained Mrs. Barnaby. "She's his deputy, and meets the trains when it's necessary and he's out of town."

"I'd like to know her," said Mary. "I'm glad that there's something to give one the kind of a thrill you naturally expect to have out here. I was beginning to have such a foreign, far-away feeling, seeing all these picturesque little German gardens with old women weeding in them. We can imagine we are abroad this winter in Cologne or Pottsdam or Bingen on the Rhine. Oh, *oh!* How quaint and dear!"

The exclamation escaped her as the gray mules stopped at the gate of an old garden, over whose stone walls arched a row of great pecan trees. A straight path ran from the gate to the kitchen door, stiffly bordered by coxcombs and princes' feather, while on each side chrysanthemums and roses and a host of old-fashioned autumn flowers made the lit-

tle plot a tangle of colors and sweet smells. There were some bee-hives under the bare peach trees, and at one side beyond them, a small vineyard where the mockingbirds still sang noisily although the grapes had all been gathered and pressed into wine. An old man with a flowing white beard and a high black hat sat on a bench by the kitchen door placidly smoking a long pipe.

"That's Mr. Metz," said Mrs. Barnaby, preparing to alight. "Come in with me."

"It's all just like one of the pictures in Joyce's studio," commented Mary, as they followed the straight walk to the door, "and this is just like one of those lovely old-master, Dutch interiors," she added, in a whisper, as Mr. Metz ushered them into the big, clean kitchen, where his wife sat knitting.

On the deep window-sill a cat lay asleep in the sun beside a pot of glowing red geraniums, and there was such an air of cleanliness and thrift and repose about the room that Mary could not help exclaiming aloud over it. As she glanced around with admiring glances her bright face showed its appreciation also, and Mrs. Metz watched it shrewdly while she talked with Mrs. Barnaby, in English so broken as to be almost unintelligible.

What the old woman saw must have satisfied her, for she accepted Mrs. Barnaby's offer after a very short parley with her husband in German, and when they rose to go she bade them wait while she made a stiff little nosegay for each of them, culled from her garden borders and edged with strong-smelling mint. In the center of Mary's was one of her handsomest coxcombs. Mrs. Barnaby smiled meaningly when she saw it, and when they had climbed back into the carriage, said in a pleased tone, "That shows that she has weighed you in the balance and is satisfied with the result. You'll get along famously with her, I'm sure, and we'll soon have you settled now, in fine shape."

An hour later Mary stood on the threshold of the cottage she had rented, with the keys of possession in her hand. Thanks to Mrs. Barnaby and the rapid gait of the gray mules, much had been accomplished in that time. The groceries they had ordered were already piled on the table in the kitchen. A load of wood was on its way. The new mattresses they had bought at the furniture shop (kept by the undertaker of the village) were promised for delivery early in the afternoon, and they had been introduced at each place as friends of the Barnabys, who were to be charged home

prices, and not the ones usually asked of strangers. Mrs. Barnaby was what she called plain-spoken, and although she made a jest of her demands they carried weight.

Their trunks, three of which contained bedclothes and dishes, stood on the front gallery waiting to be unpacked. Inside, the house looked as clean as soapsuds and fresh paint could make it. Mrs. Metz herself had attended to the scrubbing after the last tenant left. But Mary decided that she would feel more comfortable, moving in after strangers, if she should give the furniture a personal washing before they began to use it. While Norman built a fire in the kitchen stove, she unlocked one of the trunks and changed her travelling suit for a gingham dress and apron.

"Let's eat picnic fashion," called Norman, "and unpack afterward. It's nearly one o'clock, and I'm too hungry to wait. I've found a cup I can boil some eggs in, and if we don't use any dishes we won't have any to wash afterwards."

"That's a bright suggestion," Mary called back. "We haven't any time to lose if we are to get everything ready for mamma and Jack by tomorrow afternoon."

When she came dancing out into the kitchen a

few minutes later Norman had already begun his luncheon, and was walking around with a cheese sandwich in one hand and a pickle in the other, investigating the premises while he ate. Mary followed his example, and wandered from the open doorway to the open windows, looking at the view from each, and exclaiming over each new discovery. The house was on a slight knoll with a wide cotton-field stretching down between it and the little village. From this distance it looked more than ever like a toy village, against the background of low hills.

"You ought to see it from the top of the windmill," said Norman. "I climbed up while you and Mrs. Barnaby were talking so long at the gate. "I'm glad we've got a windmill. It'll save me a lot of pumping, and it makes such a fine watch-tower. You ought to see how far you can look across the country. You can see the creek. It's just a little way back of our place."

"I'm going up this minute!" answered Mary. Slipping her unfinished sandwiches into her apron pocket, she ran out to the windmill and began to swing herself from one cross-piece of the tower to another, as lightly as Norman had done.

"It's perfectly lovely!" she called back from

the top. "I'd like to perch up here all afternoon if there wasn't so much to do. I'm going to come up here often. It gives you such a high-up-above-all-your-earthly-ills feeling! There's St. Peter's," she called, "over at the south end of town. I recognize the little stone belfry. What do you suppose that square tower is at the other end of town?"

Norman came out and climbed half-way up the windmill, swinging there below her by one arm, as he slowly munched a ginger-snap.

"Oh, that," he said, as he looked in the direction which she pointed. "That's the Sisters' school. I asked Pedro this morning. It's the Academy of the Holy Angels."

Mary's face glowed as she shook back the hair which the wind kept blowing into her eyes. "That's perfectly fascinating!" she declared. "There's something beautiful to me in the thought that the little town we've come to lies between two such guardians. It's a good omen, and I'm not sorry now that we had to come."

She stayed perched on the windmill, enjoying the view and eating her sandwiches until Norman called her that the wash-water was boiling over on the stove. Then she climbed nimbly down and

started towards the kitchen door. The kitchen was in an ell of the house, and from its front window she could see the road which ran in front of the house. Just across it, half hidden by a row of bushy umbrella trees, stood two little blue cottages. They were within easy calling distance, and the voices of half a dozen children at play came cheerfully across to her. Although they spoke in a foreign tongue the chatter gave her a sense of companionship.

"Norman," she suddenly suggested, "let's stay here to-night, instead of going to the boarding-house as mamma and Mrs. Barnaby arranged. I'm not afraid with neighbors so near, and I'm sure mamma wouldn't care if she could see how quiet and peaceful it is here. We'd be saving considerable — a night's lodging for two, and we can make this real comfortable and homey by bedtime."

With the promise of hot biscuit and honey for supper Norman agreed to her plan. He was to call at the boarding-house and cancel the arrangements Mrs. Barnaby had made for them, when he went for the milk which Mr. Metz had promised to sell them. It was from the Metz bee-hives they were to have the honey, too. She had engaged it as a special treat for Jack.

Under her direction Norman fell to work making a kitchen cabinet out of two old boxes, while she scrubbed away at the chairs and tables.

"Isn't it funny the way history repeats itself?" she remarked. "This makes me think of the time that Joyce and Jack had getting settled in the Wigwam. I felt so defrauded then because I couldn't have a hand in it, and this seems a sort of compensation for what I missed then."

The exercise seemed to loosen her tongue, for as she worked she went on, "I'm truly glad that I can enjoy both the top and bottom crusts of things. Nobody, I am sure, could have squeezed more pleasure out of this last week than I did. I fairly revelled in all the luxuries we had as Mr. Robeson's guests. It comes so easy to be waited on and to be the fine lady. And on the other hand, it is a real joy to be working this way, blacking stoves and filling lamps and making things look spick and span. I can spend like a lord and I can skimp like a scrubwoman, and I really don't know which I enjoy most."

She did not attempt to put any finishing touches to the house that day, but left such things as the hanging of curtains and the few pictures they had brought until next morning. But before she

stopped everything was shining, her room was ready for the night, and a cot was made up for Norman in the room which he was to share with Jack. Later, while she waited for the biscuits to bake and for him to come home with the milk and honey, she wrote a letter to Joyce. She did not take time to go to the bottom of her trunk for writing material, but emptying the sugar from a large paper sack, cut it into several square sheets. With a big tin pan turned bottom upwards in her lap for a desk, she hastily scribbled the events of the day with a lead-pencil, which she sharpened with the carving-knife.

Joyce has that letter yet. It was scribbled in the most careless, commonplace way, just as Mary would have told it had they been together; but Joyce, who could read her little sister like a book, read between the lines and divined the disappointments she had conquered, and saw the courage it took to make the most of every amusing incident in such a cheery way, while she touched only lightly on the serious ones.

"We had a visitor a little while ago," wrote Mary, in closing. "The Reverend Paul Rochester came to call, and where, of all awkward impossible places, do you suppose he found me? Up on the

windmill tower. I had gone up again to watch the sunset, — for just a minute. The glow on the roofs of the town and the hills beyond was so lovely! If Norman had had any sense he would have ignored my high perch. He was splitting kindling by the back door, making such a noise that we could not hear Mr. Rochester's knock at the front door, so he came around.

"Mrs. Barnaby had stopped at the rectory on her way home to tell them about our coming to town, and Mrs. Rochester thought that we were all here, and that we would be so busy getting settled that we wouldn't have much time to cook things for an invalid, and she had sent the most tempting basketful of good things you ever saw. There was orange gelatine and charlotte russe, and some delicious nut sandwiches. The rector had walked all the way up here and carried the basket himself. You know I've always stood in awe of clergymen. At first this one seemed fully as dignified and reverend as all the others, and I nearly fell off my perch with embarassment when he looked up and saw me hanging there like a monkey on a stick. But the next moment we both laughed, and he seemed almost as young and boyish as Jack.

"I scuttled down in a hurry, I assure you. He only stayed a minute, just long enough to deliver the basket and his wife's message, but you've no idea how that little incident changed the whole atmosphere. I'd been looking down the white road that leads from our place into the town, thinking how lonely and foreign everything was, and how hard it would be to live all winter in a place where nobody wanted to be neighborly, and where the only people we knew were slightly old like the Barnabys or awfully old like the Metzes, and then Mr. Rochester appeared, young and so nice-looking and with a jolly twinkle in his eyes that makes you forget the clerical cut of his clothes.

"His wife must be young, too, or she couldn't be married to him, and she must be dear or she wouldn't have sent such a dainty, altogether charming basket with her message of greeting. You've no idea how their cordial welcome changed everything. Now as I look through the open door at the same road leading to the town, it doesn't look lonely and foreign any more. It makes me think of a verse that dear old Grandmother Ware taught me once. You remember how she used to take us up in her lap and make us spell the words out to her from her big Bible with the terrible pic-

tures. *'The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth!'*

"Well, grandmother's verse is coming true. It was all so crooked and uncertain and rough yesterday. But now everything is being smoothed out for us so beautifully. I have just looked out to see if Norman is coming. I can hear him whistling away down the road.

"I wish you, with your artist's eye for effect, could see the little town now, spread out below the hills in the twilight, with the windmills silhouetted against the sky. At one end is the little stone belfry of St. Peter's, at the other the square gray tower of the Academy of the Holy Angels; and just between, swinging low over the hills in the faint afterglow, the pale golden crescent of the new moon. After all, it's a good old world, Joyce, and I 'feel it in my bones' that little old Bauer is going to bring us some great good that shall make us thankful always for having come. In some way, I am sure, all our *'rough ways shall be made smooth.'*"

CHAPTER IV

MARY FINDS GAY

THE day before Thanksgiving saw the Ware family fully settled in their new home. The trunks had been unpacked and their contents disposed of to make the little cottage look as homelike as possible. Even the preparations for their Thanksgiving dinner were all made. They had been simplified by Mrs. Barnaby's gift of a jar of mince-meat, and the plump hen, which was to take the place of a turkey, had been bought already dressed.

Now at only nine o'clock the morning work was all done, and Mrs. Ware sat sewing on the south gallery where Jack had wheeled himself into the sunshine. Mary came and stood in the doorway.

"Things stay so clean here," she grumbled in a laughing way. "I could do everything there is to be done with one hand and not half try, and when you all help we get through so fast it makes me dizzy. Then there's nothing left to do but sit in the sun and wait till time to get the next meal ready.

I wish I hadn't been in such a hurry to put everything in order. I wouldn't be so restless and idle now. It makes me fidgety to have nothing to do."

"Take the basket and dishes back to the rectory," suggested Mrs. Ware, after Jack had proposed several occupations to no purpose.

"But I've never met Mrs. Rochester yet," objected Mary, "and it would be sort of awkward, going in and introducing myself."

"No more awkward than it was for Mr. Rochester to come here and introduce himself," said Jack. "You can tell her for me that that charlotte russe was perfection."

"I wonder what she is like," mused Mary, half persuaded to go and see. "If I thought she'd be approachable and easy to talk to — but — "

"Oh, you know she's all right," urged Jack, "or she never would have been so good to a family of strangers. I'll bet she's a dear, motherly old soul, in a checked apron, with gray hair and a double chin."

"Why, she couldn't be!" cried Mary. "Not and be Mr. Rochester's wife. He doesn't look much older than you do, and for all he's so dignified there's something so boyish and likable about him that I felt chummy with him right away."

" Well, the things she cooked tasted as if she were the kind of woman I said," persisted Jack, " and I shall keep on thinking of her as that kind until it's proved that my guess is wrong. I should think that anybody with as much curiosity as you have would go just to satisfy it."

" You mean you want yours satisfied," retorted Mary. " Well, she'll do it herself in a few days. She sent word that she'd call soon, so I believe that I'll wait."

Coming out she stood leaning idly against one of the gallery posts, a restless, dissatisfied little figure. Then she strolled out to the front gate and stood there awhile, looking down the deserted road. Jack's gaze followed her sympathetically, and he said to his mother in a low tone, " Poor little kid, it's going to be a dull winter for her I'm afraid. She was never cut out for solitude. She'd ' rather dwell in the midst of alarms,' and this place isn't much more diverting than a country graveyard."

Mrs. Ware's glance followed his, then she replied confidently as she looked down to thread her needle, " Oh, she'll soon adjust herself. She'll find something that will not only keep her busy but will amuse all the rest of us."

Jack picked up the magazine from which he had

been reading aloud the evening before and resumed the story, but he was conscious all the time of the little figure at the gate, and saw her without seeming to notice when she slipped around the corner of the house presently to the back yard. Then he looked up with a smile when he heard the creaking of the windmill crank at the back of the house.

"She's stopping the wheel," said Mrs. Ware, "so that she can climb to the top of the tower again. It seems to have some sort of fascination for her."

Jack went on with his story, and Mary, perched on her watch-tower, clung to the bar above and looked down over the town. The currents of air were stronger up at the height to which she had climbed. Down below scarcely a breath was stirring, but here a fresh breeze blew the hair into her eyes and began to blow the discontent out of her mind. Her wish that Jack could see the view was followed instantly by the thought that he could never, never have any other outlook than the one the wheeled chair afforded.

"It's wicked of me to be discontented one single minute," she thought remorsefully. "There I was fussing right before him about having nothing to do, when he'd give worlds just to be foot loose — to climb up here and walk about the place. And

he was so dear and considerate, never once reminded me how much harder it is for him than me, and that he has nothing else to look forward to as long as he lives."

The yellow walls of the rectory gleamed through the trees at the north end of the little hamlet, reminding her of Jack's laughing wish to know what Mrs. Rochester was like.

"It's as little as I can do to go and find out for him," she thought, "even if he did ask it in a joke. I ought to be willing to do anything in the world he expresses a wish for, poor boy. There's little enough here to amuse him."

A few minutes later, in her travelling suit and hat, with Mrs. Rochester's basket on her arm, she interrupted the reading on the gallery.

"I'm going to see your motherly friend," she announced — "to find out if she is gray-haired and double-chinned. Maybe I'll tell her how you described her."

"Don't you dare," warned Jack, laughingly. "I'll get even with you if you do."

"You've already done that on a dozen old scores," answered Mary gaily. "Good-bye, my friends and kinsmen dear! As the story books say, 'we shall see what we shall see.'"

What she saw when she rang the bell at the rectory was the exact opposite of the motherly creature whom Jack had pictured; for Mrs. Rochester, who came to the door herself, was tall and slim and very young, with the delicate, spirituelle kind of beauty that had always been plump little Mary's greatest admiration and desire. One part of Jack's guess was correct, however. She wore a big checked apron, for she was making cake, and she invited Mary into the dining-room where the materials were all spread out on the table.

With the girlish cordiality that had won her so many friends even in unsociable Bauer, she made Mary feel so much at home, that in a few moments she was insisting on helping with the cake. It seemed a matter of course that Mrs. Rochester should hand her the egg-beater, and before the eggs were whipped into a stiff white mountain of snow, they were exchanging experiences like old friends. Mrs. Rochester had found Bauer a lonely place too, at first.

"Jack says there was some great mix-up made when I alighted on this planet," said Mary. "I should have dropped down some place where 'the breaking waves dashed high on a stern and rock-

bound coast.' He says I wasn't meant for a quiet fish-pond existence."

"I know," laughed her hostess. "You feel as if you were bound into the wrong book. You'd be perfectly satisfied to find yourself in one of Scott's novels, in a jumble of knights and tourneys and border wars, but you would be bored beyond endurance to have to be one of the characters in Jane Austen's stories."

"Oh, you *do* know," cried Mary eagerly, emphasizing her pleasure with a harder bang of the egg-beater. "You understand exactly. There's nothing tamer than Miss Austen's stories. Why, there's pages and pages taken up with just discussing the weather and each other's health; and they do such trivial, inane things and go around and around in such a deadly monotonous circle that sometimes I've been so out of patience with them that I wanted to throw the book into a corner."

"But you never did throw it down," answered Mrs. Rochester, "you read on to the end and in spite of yourself you were interested in those same commonplace happenings and conversations, just as readers before you have been interested in them and always will be as long as those books live. And I'll tell you why. You read them to the end because

they are true pictures of the lives of average people. The majority of us have to put up with the humdrum, no matter how much we long for the heroic, and it's a good thing to read such books as 'Emma' and 'Pride and Prejudice' every now and then, as a sort of spirit-level. We're more satisfied to amble along the road if everybody else drives a slow nag too."

"I'm not," declared Mary. "I want to whizz past everything in sight that is poky and slow. I know it would be lots easier for me if I could only make up my mind to the fact that nothing exciting and important is ever going to happen to me, but I can't break myself of the habit of expecting it. I've felt that way as far back as I can remember. I'm always looking for something grand and unexpected, and every morning when I wake up it gives me a sort of thrill to think, maybe it will come to-day."

"Well, if you're going to stay in Bauer for awhile you certainly do need another dose of 'Emma,'" answered Mrs. Rochester, nodding to the shelves in the adjoining library, where stood a well thumbed edition of Miss Austen's works. "Take her home with you, and any of the books you think

your brother would like. We are glad to make our library a circulating one."

Mary's face showed her pleasure quite as much as her words, as she left her seat by the table to slip into the great book-lined room and glance around it.

"You've made up for one of my disappointments," she called back. "I had counted so much on having the library in San Antonio to draw on this winter, and this is even better, for I'm sure that they haven't all these rare old prints and first editions that I see here."

Her five minutes' call stretched into an hour, when she found that Mrs. Rochester had been brought up in Washington and had spent her school days there. Then it stretched into two, for some one drove in from the country with a carriage load of autumn leaves, and Mary stayed to help arrange them in the little church for the Thanksgiving service next day. It was nearly noon when she finally started home with several books under her arm, her usual hopefulness and buoyancy of spirits quite restored.

"Mamma and I can't both be away from Jack at the same time," she said in response to Mrs.

Rochester's invitation to attend the service next day. "I want her to come. I've already had my share of Thanksgiving. I've been thankful every minute while I've been here that I discovered you. It's been a beautiful morning."

"Come over often," urged Mrs. Rochester cordially. "I can always find something for you to do, and I'd love to have you come."

Mary's wave of the hand as she turned to latch the gate at the end of the walk was answered by a flutter of Mrs. Rochester's apron in the doorway, and each went her way smiling over the recollection of the other.

"She's a diverting little piece," Mrs. Rochester reported to her husband at noon. "I laughed all the time she was here."

"She's a darling," Mary reported at home, and quoted her at intervals for several days.

"She's promised to take me with her sometime when she drives out to call at the ranches. Nearly all the members of St. Boniface are out-of-town people, so they'll probably not call on us she says. But she's coming as soon as she can get around to it. I saw our name on a list she has hanging beside her calendar. But there's nearly a week full of things for her to do before she gets to us. I wish

that I had a list of duties and engagements that would keep me going every minute, the way she has to go."

"You can easily fill out a list that will keep you busy for awhile," answered her mother. "While you were gone Jack and I got to discussing dates, and it was somewhat of a shock to find that Christmas will be here so soon. One forgets the calendar in this summer-like climate. Whatever we send to Holland and Joyce must be started from here in less than three weeks, and as our gifts must be all home-made we cannot afford to lose any time in beginning."

The problem of Christmas giving had always been a knotty one in the Ware household, but it was especially hard this year. Mary spent nearly all afternoon making her list of names with the accompanying list of gifts that seemed suitable for each one. There were so many to whom she longed to send little remembrances that the length of it was appalling. Then she revised it, putting in one column such people as Madam Chartley and Mrs. Lee, to whom she decided to write letters — the gayest, brightest greetings she could think of. Still there were a goodly number left to provide with gifts, no matter how simple, and she was busy till

bed-time measuring and figuring over the amount of material she would need for each, and how much it would cost. It had been decided that she should go to San Antonio for a day to attend to the family shopping.

"The trouble is," she sighed next morning, "it's the simplest things that are always the hardest to get. Don't you remember, in the story of Beauty and the Beast, the father had no difficulty in buying ropes of jewels and costly things for his oldest daughters, but it almost cost him his life to get the one common little white rose that his youngest daughter so modestly asked for. I could do this shopping in a few hours if I did not have to stop to consider pennies, but there are several little things that may take me all day to find. I'm sure that that particular kind of narrow beading that I need for Lloyd's present will prove to be the fatal white rose. I can't make it without and there isn't time to send back East for it."

"Maybe you'd better arrange to stay over night," suggested her mother, "and take two days to look around for what you want. Of course you couldn't go to a hotel alone, and it would be too expensive even if you had company, but Mrs. Rochester might

be able to recommend some private family who has rooms for transients."

Mary caught at the idea so eagerly that had it not been Thanksgiving Day and she feared to intrude, she would have gone that very hour to ask if the Rochesters knew of such a place. She remembered that they were to have guests to dinner. Fortunately for her peace of mind the rector and his wife called for a few moments just before dusk. Mrs. Rochester did know of a quiet inexpensive place where she could spend the night, and then and there slipped off her gloves to write a cordial note of introduction.

It rained the Friday after Thanksgiving, but the next day was fair, and Mary insisted on doing the week's washing Saturday morning, and as much of the ironing as she could accomplish in the afternoon, in order to be able to start early Monday morning. Several times she left her tubs to run into the house and jot down some small items on her memorandum, which she remembered would be indispensable in making up their Christmas packages. Once she thought of something in the night, when the barking of a neighbor's dog awakened her.

If she had been alone in the room she would have

lighted a candle and made a note of it. As it was she was afraid to do so lest she waken her mother, and afraid not to lest it should slip her mind before morning. Finally she settled the difficulty by putting her hand to her head and pulling out several hairs which she twisted together and tied around her finger.

"There!" she said to herself. "Hair will make me think of herring, and then ring will make me think of the little white celluloid rings that I must get for those safety-pin holders."

Armed with Mrs. Rochester's letter she started off gaily on the Monday morning train. It was not due in the city till nearly ten, so she decided that it would save time to go at once to the largest department store, check her suit-case and wait until shopping hours were over before going out to the boarding-house which Mrs. Rochester had recommended.

She had thought San Antonio charming the first time she saw it, but it seemed doubly so now that she came back to it, as one familiar with its principal streets and landmarks. The life, the color, the holiday air of the crowds, the fête day atmosphere of the old town itself, exhilarated her till her cheeks glowed like roses, and several times,

both on the street and in the stores, she caught herself whistling half under her breath.

Although the usual Monday morning bargain hunters were out in throngs, she found no trouble in making her purchases. Everything seemed to be in her favor this morning. The shop girls were unusually responsive and helpful, showed her just what she wanted or suggested something better than she had thought of. Only once or twice did the prices go above the limit she had set for them, and several times they were lower. By quarter to twelve she had checked off two thirds of the articles on her list.

Elated by this success, she stood waiting at the transfer desk for her change, looking around with unabated interest. Suddenly her attention was attracted to a girl in a brown tailor suit, standing in the next aisle. Her back was turned towards Mary, but there was something familiar looking in the poise of the graceful head; something very familiar looking in the puffs of soft auburn-bronze hair held by amber combs, and arranged so becomingly under the big brown hat.

Mary had been on the look-out all morning for the girl whom Jack had recognized at the hotel as Gay Melville. She might have missed her had Gay

been an ordinary blonde or brunette, but as Jack said, there was no mistaking that glorious hair. Snatching up the proffered change, which the cashier put through the cage window, she pushed her way into the next aisle. The girl turned. The big plumed hat drooped over her face, still Mary recognized the delicate profile, the slight tilt of the slender chin. It was an opportunity which she could not afford to lose, and as the girl turned her back again to receive a package held out to her by a clerk, and started slowly to the door, Mary hurried after her.

Almost breathless in her eagerness she exclaimed impulsively, "I beg your pardon — but aren't you *Gay?*"

There was an instant of freezing silence as the eyes of the girl in brown swept Mary from head to foot.

"Well, not particularly," was the indignant reply.

The roll of her r's emphasized Mary's mistake. It was evidently some stranger from the North whom she had accosted. One glance into her full face made Mary see how dire her mistake had been. There was no resemblance whatever in that to Gay. Wishing that she could drop out of sight through

the floor, she hastily apologized and hurried out into the street, her cheeks burning, as she smarted under the recollection of the stranger's supercilious glance.

"She needn't have been so snippy," Mary thought. "*Any*body is liable to make such mistakes."

Not until she had crossed the street and was stopped short by her own reflection in a mirror in the show window opposite, did she realize how her question might have sounded.

"Oh, she must have thought that I was asking her if she wasn't *gay! Gay with a little g!*" she gasped. "No wonder she looked at me so freezingly."

She was so perturbed by this discovery, that she walked on, unmindful of the direction. When a group of children crowded past her on the narrow pavement, she turned into a side street to avoid being jostled, and walked aimlessly for some distance. It was the sight of a green kettle swinging above a door which she was approaching that brought her to herself with a start. Mrs. Rochester had told her to stop at the Sign of the Green Kettle for lunch, and had given her directions for finding it. Here she had stumbled upon it unaware,

just as the city bells were beginning to clang for noon.

At the next glance her heart went to thumping so hard that she could plainly hear it. There on the step leading up to the door of the Green Kettle, stood Gay Melville; the real Gay this time. There was no shadow of doubt about it. As she looked, Mary wondered how she ever could have mistaken the other girl for her, although each had hair wonderfully like the other.

This one carried a violin case. She had paused on her way in to call back something to the girl in the carriage, who had brought her down town. And the girl in the carriage was Roberta — Roberta of the boyish speech and coquettish eyelashes, whose laughing question held the girl on the step long enough for Mary to reach it too, and stand there beside her while she gathered courage to speak.

It was the little pin thrust through Gay's tie which finally brought the words trembling to Mary's lips, for it was the Warwick Hall pin which only its alumni might wear; those who had kept the four years' tryst with all its requirements. It was a mailed hand rising from a heart to grasp a spear, the motto and the crest of Edryn.

All diffidence fled at that familiar sight, but this

time Mary did not ask if the girl were gay. With a gesture toward the pin she cried breathlessly, "Oh, I know by *that* that you are Miss Melville. *Aren't* you!" Gay after one look into the eager gray eyes said quite as cordially, "And you're Mary Ware! I had a letter from Betty Lewis this very morning telling me to be sure to find you."

She gave a quick glance at the chatelaine watch she wore. "I haven't a minute to stop — I'm to play an obligato for the great prima donna, Madame de Martel, and she has a beast of a temper which she lets loose if a person is one second late at rehearsal. But I must take time to say one thing if she wipes me off the face of the earth for it. The girls' letters have made me wild to know you. At what hotel can I find you? I'll call this very day."

"We've taken a cottage in Bauer," Mary answered hastily. "I came down on a little shopping expedition, and am on my way in here for luncheon."

The heavy chords of a piano accompaniment rolled threateningly through the music rooms upstairs, and Gay shrugged her shoulders impatiently. "Do be a long time over it," she begged as she

turned towards the stairs. "I'll get through as quickly as possible and hurry back for another word with you."

Mary watched her out of sight before starting into the dining-room of the Green Kettle, and then deliberately pinched herself to make sure that she was awake. It was a good hard nip, which hurt, and smiling to herself because it proved that she was not dreaming, she sat down at a table near the window to gloat over the fact that one of her best dreams had come true at last. She had met Gay Melville.

The lunch was a good one, but it would have made no difference to Mary what was put before her that day. Anything would have been nectar and ambrosia served to the accompaniment of the music overhead. A chorus of cherubim and seraphim could not have left her more uplifted. Madame de Martel might have the temper of a beast at times, but she had a voice of rare sweetness and power, and the knowledge that it was Gay's violin pouring out that tremulous, tender, heart-breaking obligato, enhanced Mary's enjoyment of every note.

The rehearsal was a short one. All that the famous visiting singer wanted was to make sure,

since her own accompanists had failed her, that the local ones were satisfactory. It came to an end just as Mary began her dessert, and almost instantly it seemed Gay was at her elbow, and seating herself in the chair beside her.

"Isn't it a shame I haven't more than two minutes to stay," she began. "This is like having Warwick Hall and Lloydsboro Valley rolled into one, to find somebody who loves them both as much as I do. I could talk a week without stopping about each place, and ask a thousand questions, but I'm due at a luncheon out on Government Hill by the time the next car can put me there. Immediately after that is over we're all going to the polo tournament. All during rehearsal I kept trying to think of some way I could arrange to see you, and there's only one. You've simply got to come home with me to stay all night. Go on and finish your shopping, and I'll come down for you after the tournament and meet you anywhere you say."

The invitation, as cordial as it was sudden, was gladly accepted and Gay exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so delighted to think I've found you at last! You've no idea how often you were quoted the summer I was in the Valley. Lloyd and Betty and the old Colonel and Dr. Alex Shelby were always saying

'as little Mary Ware says.' I feel as if I'd known you from babyhood up."

"And I know all about your past," laughed Mary. She was about to mention several incidents to prove her claim, when Gay stopped her by a glance at the clock and the question: "Wouldn't you like to see the dress parade at the Post this evening? Most people do, and it's well worth seeing."

Would she *like* it! Mary's beaming face answered the question before her usually ready tongue found a word, and Gay smiled as she hastily drew on her gloves and picked up her violin case.

"I'd like to keep you all to myself to-night," she said, "but I do want you to meet some of the people that Kitty Walton liked best when she visited me last year. I'll pick up Roberta and Lieutenant Boglin to take dinner with us if I can get them. They're always so nice to my Warwick Hall friends. They were both wild about Kitty. Well, at quarter to five, then, I'll meet you — where?"

Finally the glove counter at Joske's was agreed upon as a meeting place, and with a friendly pat on the shoulder in passing, Gay hurried away to keep her engagement. Smiling blissfully after her, Mary whispered to herself with one of her old childish wriggles of pleasure, "And *Bogey*, too."

CHAPTER V

AT FORT SAM HOUSTON

PROMPTLY at the time agreed upon, Mary took her station by the glove counter, almost sure that Gay would be late. It was one of the Warwick Hall traditions that something tragic always happened to Gay's clothes at the last moment, to delay her departure. But she had scarcely seated herself and deposited her suit-case on the floor beside her when the door opened and Gay came breezily into the store. Her hat was awry and her hair disheveled.

"On time for once," she exclaimed triumphantly with a glance at the clock. "But I couldn't have been if Roberta hadn't come to the rescue. She brought me down in their carriage. It's Roberta Mayrell," she explained, as they made their way as rapidly as possible down the crowded aisle.

"She isn't really one of the Army girls, but she lives just outside the Post and has always been

counted in everything there, since she was old enough to talk. I've been telling her all about you on the way down."

"Well, I hope she'll find me as interesting as the alligators," began Mary, remembering the speech she had overheard from the hotel balcony. But Gay was stopping to apologize to an old lady whom she had bumped into, and did not hear the remark. The next moment they were outside and at the curbstone, where a carriage drawn by two Kentucky horses was in waiting, and Roberta was stepping down with outstretched hands to welcome her.

Roberta at close range was even more fascinating than when seen from a hotel balcony, and Mary, sitting between the two girls as they drove along towards Government Hill, had much the same feeling that a thirsty Bedouin has when after miles of desert journeying he finds himself beside the well of a green oasis.

They were fairly bubbling over with high spirits, and it was impossible to be with them and not share their exhilaration. Before they had gone two blocks the weight of care and anxiety that had been resting on Mary's shoulders ever since Jack's accident, began to slip off. It almost gave her

a sense of having wings, to be so light and care free.

The last eight months with their constant association with suffering and anxiety about finances had been like a hard march through the sands. Now the sudden substitution of something frivolous and young was so refreshing that she giggled almost hysterically in her enjoyment of it.

"Oh, we forgot to tell you," exclaimed Gay as they came in sight of the parade grounds. "There's to be a hop at the gymnasium to-night for the visiting polo team. They got it up on short notice. Lieutenant Boglin told me about it when I invited him to come to dinner. He asked if he might take you, and I said he might, for of course you won't want to miss it, and old Bogey is quite the nicest officer in the bunch when it comes to giving a girl a good time."

Mary's face wore such a comical expression of blended delight and dismay that Roberta laughed, and Gay stopped the refusal that Mary was beginning to stammer out by putting both hands over her ears.

"No, I won't listen," she declared. "Of course you didn't expect to do anything like this, and didn't bring the proper clothes, but it is such an

informal affair that it doesn't make any difference. Roberta and I can rig you out in something of mine. It will be all the more fun."

"Oh, it's just the larkiest lark that ever was!" exclaimed Mary so excited over the prospect that her cheeks were growing redder and redder, and her eyes shining with happy anticipation.

"This day has been full of thrills, and — oo, oo! There goes another!" she added with a little shiver of delight as the band began to play. The carriage had stopped at the end of the parade ground, where the usual crowd of spectators was gathered.

"Martial music always sends cold shivers up and down my back," she said gravely. "It makes me want to cheer and march right off to do something big and brave — 'storm the heights,' or bleed and die for my country, or something of that sort. I've always thought that I'd have been a soldier if I hadn't been born a girl."

She laughed as she said it, but there was a quiver of earnestness in her voice. Parade was a matter-of-course affair to Gay and Roberta, a part of the weekly routine of Post life, which familiarity made ordinary. They exchanged amused glances which Mary did not see, and made remarks and criticisms on the manœuvres which she did not hear. Wholly

absorbed, she leaned forward in the carriage, watching every movement of the drill.

It is always an inspiring sight, even to one who looks no farther than the outward show, admiring the clock-like precision which makes a battalion move as one man; but to Mary every khaki coat in the regiment clothed a hero. Lexington and Valley Forge, Gettysburg and Chickamauga called to her through every drum-beat and bugle note.

She had loved her old dog-eared copy of the History of the United States, and many a time had spread it out on her desk to re-read, when she should have been studying other things. She had pored over its stories of war till the black and white of its printed pages had transformed her into a little fire-ball of a patriot. Now as she saw for the first time these men who stood as the guardians of "Old Glory," everything she had ever read of heroism and blood-stained battle-fields and glorious dying, came back to her in a flood of enthusiasm which nearly lifted her to her feet. When at last the band struck into "The Star-spangled Banner" and the guns fired the signal which heralded the lowering of the colors, her plain little face was almost transfigured with the exalted emotions of the moment.

"Aye, call it holy ground,
The soil that they have trod,"

she was repeating to herself, when she became aware that Roberta was trying to attract her attention, and was holding out a box of candy.

"Come down to earth!" she exclaimed laughingly. "I tried to get you to take some earlier in the action, but you hadn't eyes for anything but the brass buttons. I don't believe you would have heard thunder!"

"It wasn't brass buttons I was seeing," began Mary. "It was —" Then realizing the utter hopelessness of trying to explain what soul-stirring visions had been hers for that little space of time that the band played and the heroes of the past as well as the present passed before her, she did as Roberta advised, came down to earth and took a caramel.

When they reached Major Melville's house in the officers' quarters, Roberta dismissed the carriage and went in with Gay and Mary. She had decided not to change her dress for the hop, she said as she threw off her long cloak in the hall, revealing the pretty frock of pink and gray foulard which she had worn at the luncheon.

Mrs. Melville came out to meet them, a large

sandy-haired woman with a certain faded fairness and enough of a resemblance to Gay to suggest what she might have looked like in her teens. Her cordial welcome put Mary at ease at once, and she followed the girls up the broad staircase, feeling that this visit was quite the most delightful thing which had happened to her since she left Warwick Hall.

While Gay rummaged through trunks and wardrobes to find party raiment for her guest, Mary walked about the room, experiencing more thrills at every turn; for on each wall and book-shelf and bracket was some picture or souvenir of Warwick Hall or Lloydsboro Valley.

"Oh, there's Lloyd and Betty and the Walton girls!" she cried. "I have this same picture at home, and one like this of Madam Chartley too, in her high-back chair with the carved griffins on it.

"What a splendid picture this is of Dr. Alex Shelby," she called a moment later. Then catching sight of a larger one on the mantel in a silver frame, she exclaimed in surprise, "Why, you have *two* of Doctor Alex."

Gay was deep in a closet, her head between rows of dress-skirts, and she made no answer; but Roberta, perching in the window-seat, cleared her throat to attract Mary's attention, and then with

an impish smile held up seven fingers and pointed in different directions to five other photographs that Mary had not yet discovered.

"One for each day in the week," she said in a low tone. "I'd give a good deal to see that man. He was here last spring, but I was down on the coast and missed him. I intend to make a point of staying at home next time he comes. I want to see for myself what's up. Gay pretends there isn't anything, but I have my own ideas."

"Oh, is he coming again?" cried Mary.

Roberta's only answer was a significant nod, for Gay emerged from the closet just then.

"There's nothing in there," she announced, "but I've just thought of one that Lucy left here this spring. I'll ask mother where it is."

"You see," said Roberta as the door closed behind Gay, "I wouldn't tease her if she'd confess anything, but she won't. Kitty Walton thinks I've guessed right too. She said that from the moment she heard about their romantic meeting she was sure something would come of it."

"Oh, tell me about it," urged Mary. "I know Doctor Alex so well that I can't help being interested."

"And do you know a place in Lloydsboro Valley

called the Log Cabin?" asked Roberta. "A fine country home built of logs and furnished with beautiful old heirlooms? Gay's sister, Mrs. Harcourt, rented it one summer."

"Indeed I do know it," assented Mary. "It is a fascinating place, with a big outside fire-place on the porch, and the front is covered with a climbing rose. We used to pass it often."

"Well, Kitty says that the day after the Harcourts took possession, Gay put a ladder against the front of the house and climbed up on it to hang a mirror on the outside of her window-sill, the way they do in Holland. It was one she had brought all the way from Amsterdam. And while she was up on the ladder, looking like a picture, of course, with the roses all about her and the sunshine turning her hair to gold, Dr. Shelby came by on horseback. She saw him in the mirror and the girls teased her about it — called it her Lady of Shalott mirror and him her Knight of the Looking-glass. Kitty says he was devotion itself to her all summer."

What more she might have revealed was interrupted by Gay's return. She tossed an armful of dainty muslin and lace on the bed, and for a few moments all three gave their undivided attention to the trying-on process.

"I must confess it doesn't look as if it were fitted to you in perfect health," confessed Roberta, "but it's one of those soft clinging things that doesn't have to fit like a glove. I can pin it up on you to make it look all right, and it's so pretty with all that fine lace and embroidery that it'll pass muster anywhere."

Gay sat down to make some slight alteration in the girdle, while Roberta invited Mary to a seat in front of the dressing-table, proposing to try her skill on her as a hair-dresser. It was all so delightfully intimate and friendly, just such a situation as Mary had longed for in her dream-castle building, that she even felt at liberty to grow a little personal with Roberta. She peeped out through the hair which now hung over her face, to watch Roberta's face reflected in the mirror opposite.

"Do you know," she remarked with a mischievous glance, like a skye terrier peeping through its bangs, "that I've actually lain awake nights, wondering if you'd been persuaded yet to give up that 'adorable little curl.'"

Roberta's mouth opened wide in astonishment, and she dropped the comb with which she was parting Mary's hair.

"How spooky!" she cried. "I was just thinking

about that myself. Who in the world told you anything about that?"

"Oh, I overheard the remark," confessed Mary. "I was on one of those hotel balconies all hidden by moon-vines when you and Gay and Mr. Wade and the officer you call Bogey came out into the court. I was so lonesome for some young person to talk to, and so close to you all that I could see the comb slipping out of Gay's hair. I didn't know who she was then. If I had I should have leaned over the railing and called to her. Wouldn't it have made a sensation?

"I'll never forget how either of you looked. She was in white with white violets, and you were in pale lemon yellow with a scarf over your shoulders that looked like a white moonbeam spangled with dewdrops. It slipped down as you started to go and see the alligators, and that Mr. Wade drew it up for you and said what he did about the curl."

"That was the first time he ever mentioned it," explained Roberta. "I thought when you spoke that you meant last night. I was going to tell Gay about it, and as long as you're so interested I don't mind telling you, too. You know Mr. Wade has been very nice to me, and I thought he was great

fun until he began to get sentimental. My brother William knew him at college, and he told me what I might expect. He said 'that chap always gets sentimental with every girl he goes with.' It's a great thing to have plenty of brothers to put you wise.

"When Mr. Wade began that nonsense about wanting one of those little curls and its being the most fetching thing he had ever seen I laughed at him. But it only made him the more determined. He wrote some poetry about wearing it over his heart forever and all that sort of thing. If he only could have known how Billy and I shrieked over it! Of course I hadn't given him the slightest encouragement, or it would have been different —"

"Roberta," interrupted Gay sternly, "how can you say that? You know you looked at him. I saw you do it. And when you look out at anybody from under those lashes, whether you mean it or not you *do* look flirtatious, and you know it."

"I don't!" contradicted Roberta hotly, with boyish directness. "I can't help the way my lashes are kinked, and I'm very sure I'm not going to pull them out to keep people from getting a wrong impression. Anyhow there's no kink in my tongue!

I told him straight enough what I thought of his silly speeches. I put a stop to them last night, all right."

"How?" demanded Gay.

"Well," began Roberta, plaiting Mary's hair so energetically that it pulled dreadfully. "He went over the same performance again, begging me for that little curl in token that I'd be his'n forevermore, etc. And after he'd spun it out into a most romantic proposal I said very sweetly, 'Really, Mr. Wade, to be honest with you, I can't afford to give away a seventy-five cent curl to every man who asks for one. You see I'm always financially embarrassed, for papa won't let me borrow after I've spent my monthly allowance, and I never by any chance have a cent left over after the second of the month. But if you must have a curl I'll give you Madame Main's address on Houston Street, where you can get an exact duplicate. I'm sure it will be just as good to wear over your heart as mine would.'"

"Roberta, you little beast!" laughed Gay. "How could you give him the impression they were false, when you know very well they grow tight on your own scalp?"

"I wanted to see if he would say 'with all thy

faults I love thee still.' But he didn't. He got very stiff and red and walked away, and spent the rest of the evening flirting with Louie Rowan to show that he didn't care."

Gay continuing to shake her head in a shocked and disapproving way, Roberta cried out, "I don't care! It's no worse than what you said to a certain freshman who proposed to you."

"I don't call that a proposal," calmly disagreed Gay. "He didn't ask anything. He simply took it for granted that I'd fall all over myself to accept him. Mary, what would you say to a boy, one whom you'd always known but who'd never been particularly nice to you, who would march up to you some day and say: 'You suit me better than any girl I know, and I'd like to talk over arrangements with you now. Of course we couldn't marry till a year after my graduation, but I want to have it settled before I go away, so that I'll know what to depend on. My family all tell me that it's risky business, choosing a wife with red hair, but I'm willing to take the chances.'"

"Now, Gay, you know it wasn't as bald as that," protested Roberta. "He put in all sorts of 'long and short sweetenin'.'"

"It amounted to the same thing," persisted Gay,

and in answer to Mary's gasping question, "What *did* you say?" she replied:

"I couldn't speak at first, I was so furious at his speech about red hair. But I managed to tell him several things before I finished, and nothing can be frostier and snippier than a sixteen year old girl when she tries to appear very dignified. That was my age then. The thing that made him maddest however, was that I told him that even the 'frog who would a-wooing go' knew how to go about such a matter in a much better way than he did. That he'd better wait till he was older, and amounted to something more than a mere silly boy. My snubbing almost gave him apoplexy, but it did him good in the long run."

"A proposal, and she was a year younger than I am now," thought Mary, wishing with a queer little throb of envy that she had some such experience to confess. Roberta was only nineteen now, and to judge by Gay's teasing remarks had had any number of romantic affairs. Lloyd was only fourteen when Phil first began to care so much for her.

Roberta was putting the finishing touches to her hair now, and as Mary's eyes met their wistful reflection in the mirror, she wondered if there would ever be a time when any one would care enough for

her to come to her with the momentous question. She wouldn't mind so much being an old maid if she could only have some such experience to lay away in her memory, as people lay away treasures in rose-leaves and lavender. But so far she couldn't count even a susceptible youth like young Mr. Wade, or a conceited freshman like Gay's early admirer. She wanted to ask how it felt to be proposed to, and thus keep the conversation rolling along in the same interesting groove. But Roberta suddenly switched off to saddles. She was about to buy a new one, and saddles, as Roberta presented the topic, became so vastly important that Mary did not have the courage to attempt to turn the talk back to the subject of mere men.

It was one of Roberta's chief characteristics that she swept everything before her by the sheer force of her personality. She dominated whatever company she was in, and the most frivolous things she said carried weight and made people listen because of the way she said them. She made statements in the same manner she was now thrusting the safety-pins into Mary's skirt-bands, in a direct, forcible way that made people feel that they might be depended upon.

"Roberta's pins always stay where they are put,"

Gay remarked admiringly, as she watched the capable way in which Mary was being fastened into her borrowed gown. "There's no danger of your coming to pieces, when she fixes you. Sometimes I think that she must hypnotize things. It's a gift with her. There! You look perfectly fine. Come on down stairs and let's try that piece of new music before dinner."

Mary had her doubts about looking perfectly fine. She was uncomfortably conscious that the dress was not a good fit. It was too tight in the arm-holes and too short in the waist. But the girls seemed proud of the costume they had evolved for her, the parting glance in the mirror showed that the general effect was becoming, and their compliments were most reassuring. So she followed them down stairs in a very elated and "partified" state of mind.

The old Major's affable greeting as she entered the living-room was as cordial as his wife's had been, and seemed to place her at once on the footing of an old friend. She sank into the comfortable chair he pushed forward for her with the sensation that she was coming back to a familiar hearthstone, where she had been a guest many times. It was very queer, but it was decidedly

pleasant to have it all seem so homelike and familiar.

With such surroundings Mary ought to have appeared at her best, but Roberta's dominating presence made her silent and shy. It had not had that effect when they were up-stairs together, but now in the presence of older people Roberta gave the effect of a lamp that has suddenly been turned up to a brighter flame. She was positively brilliant, Mary thought, and made everybody else in the room seem of secondary interest. Roberta, who ran in and out every day, felt the same freedom that a daughter of the house would have. She laughingly pushed Mrs. Melville into a chair and ordered her to sit still while *she* ran up-stairs for the forgotten spectacles. She joked with the Major about numberless things which were meaningless to Mary because she had not shared their beginnings, and when she sat down at the piano and played with strong masterful touches, it really seemed that what Gay had jokingly said about her having hypnotic powers was true.

Mary felt as if she had been thrust into a corner and deprived of power to come out. At first she was so absorbed in her enjoyment of the music that she was not conscious of that sensation, but

it oppressed her when Lieutenant Boglin and the Captain of the polo team, a Mr. Mills, came in. They were strangers to her but old friends of all the others, and she suddenly felt herself as self-conscious and shy as the bashful little country mouse of the fable. She began to contrast herself with the other girls, and try to find a reason for the difference which she felt existed.

"It's partly because they've always lived in the heart of things," she thought, a trifle enviously. "They're used to meeting strangers, and they're pretty and gifted and accomplished; a very different thing from being just 'plain little Mary Ware,' with no talents or *anything*. I can't even play Yankee Doodle with one finger, as Norman does."

When they went out to dinner the uneven number and the small size of the company made the conversation general around the table. If it had been a larger party with only her immediate neighbors to give ear, Mary was sure that she could have found plenty to say to the Major on one side, or to Lieutenant Boglin on the other. But Roberta kept the conversational ball rolling, and always in directions that Mary could not follow. She knew nothing of polo or golf or the people of the Post, and the funny stories and quick-witted replies which

circled around the table gave her no opportunity to rise to the occasion as the others did.

They were all so vastly entertained and entertaining themselves that no one seemed to notice Mary's silence. She was angry with herself because she could not chime in with the others, and thought with flaming cheeks that they must think her dreadfully stupid and unresponsive; just a bread-and-butter miss, not yet out of the nursery. Once there came a place where an anecdote about Hawkins and a new school-girl would have fitted in beautifully if she could only have mustered up courage to tell it. She had a conundrum too, when the others were propounding them, and had opened her mouth to tell it — in fact had said "Did you ever hear — " when somebody else who had not heard her tremulous beginning captured the attention of the table with one of his own. The sound of her voice thus suddenly stopped made her blush, choke, take a drink of water and subside into silence again.

It was not until coffee was being served afterward in the living-room, that Mary found her tongue. Roberta did not take coffee, and at the Major's request had gone to the piano to play a dashing fantasie that he always called for on such occasions.

"Mary Ware in Texas"

"He seated himself beside her, coffee-cup in hand"

The lieutenant, who, as Mary had feared, had classed her as a callow little school-girl who couldn't talk except in embarrassed monosyllables, had been wondering why Gay had made such a point of his meeting her. Now as he looked across the room at her animated face, responsive to every chord of the brilliantly executed music, he decided that there might be some reason for Gay's interest in her which he had not yet fathomed, and he at once proceeded to find out.

He started towards her, stopping to say in an aside to Gay, "What's the little girl's name? I've forgotten. Oh, thank you." Then he deliberately pulled up a chair, tête-à-tête wise, and seated himself beside her, coffee-cup in hand.

"Miss Ware," he began in a flatteringly confidential tone, "it is an old saying that the 'shallows murmur, but the deeps are dumb.' Is that why you are so silent this evening?"

It was easy now, under cover of the music, and in response to such deferential attention to make a reply, and Mary began at a rate that made Bogey "sit up and take notice," as he expressed it afterward.

"No, I was only like the fox in Æsop's fables, the one that went to dine with the stork, you know.

Don't you remember, the stork put the soup into such a slender-necked deep vase that only a long-beaked bird like himself could reach it. You see the people you talked about to-night were utter strangers to me, and I never saw a polo game, so I couldn't very well dip into the conversation."

"By George!" exclaimed Bogey. "That wasn't very considerate of us, *was* it?"

"Oh, I enjoyed it!" Mary hastened to add. "Only I was afraid you'd think I was dreadfully stupid. It made me think of the time I used that same fable to get rid of an unwelcome caller when I was at a house-party in Kentucky. I wanted to be with the older girls who were to be bridesmaids, and watch their preparations for the wedding, and this child tagged after me so persistently that I lay awake nights trying to plan some way to get rid of her. It was the fable that finally suggested it. I had lots of fun playing the stork, but I never realized before just how *she* must have felt, till I took the part of fox to-night."

"Tell me how you did it," insisted the lieutenant. He liked the way Mary's face lighted up when she talked, and the way her dimples flashed in and out as she chattered on. Gay looked over approvingly a little later when his hearty laugh showed that he

was thoroughly amused by something that she had said.

The tête-à-tête was ended by the stopping of the music and the arrival of the man who was to be Gay's escort, and almost immediately after it seemed, although in fact it was half an hour, the 'bus whistle sounded outside, and Mary was being hurried into her borrowed party cloak and helped into the waiting 'bus.

"It always goes around the Post collecting passengers on such occasions as this," Bogey told her. "You can imagine we sometimes have a jolly crowd."

It was an old story to the other passengers, but as they passed the sally port where the sentinel stood attention, Mary nearly fell out in her eagerness to see all the novel sights. The lieutenant smiled at her enthusiasm. Visiting girls always exhibited it in some degree, but never in quite such a precipitate manner as Mary.

"She's a funny little piece," he thought as the whole 'bus load laughed at her naïve comment on the sentinel, "but there is something genuine and likeable about her. She shall have the time of her life to-night if I can give it to her."

CHAPTER VI

ON THE CREEK-BANK

THERE is only a partial account of that evening in Mary's Good Times book. She recorded the fact that the General himself came and talked to her a few minutes, and laughed several times at her replies till people turned to see who it was that he found so amusing. The handsome officer of the day in sword and spurs was brought up to be introduced, and there was a most gratifying list of names on her well-filled program. Lieutenant Boglin had dutifully seen to that.

Had it not been for one circumstance the evening would have been a succession of thrills, and she could have filled several pages with enthusiastic recollections of it. That one little happening, however, marred the whole occasion. She made no record of it in her Good Times book, and she made up her mind never to speak of it, but to seal it up in its particular memory cell as the bees do any intruding object which threatens to poison their honey.

There was so much else to tell about her visit, that for several days after her return she kept the family amused by her lively descriptions. She and Gay had had a whole string of adventures the morning after the hop, when they went down town together to finish her shopping. There had been some interesting guests from New Zealand at luncheon, who had vied with each other in telling marvelous yarns, and Mary had stored them all away to repeat at home.

With so much else to talk about she might have succeeded in keeping her resolution, had not she and Jack gone off to the creek one afternoon, instead of taking their usual excursion towards the village. The spot where they paused was a place which seemed to invite confidences. She wheeled his chair along the bank, close to the water's edge, until they came to a secluded circle of shade under an ancient cypress tree. There she sat down opposite him on a big boulder.

They were some distance from the main road. Except when a wagon rattled down the hill and across the ford it was so very still that the rush of water over the pebbles sounded almost brawling. The constant gurgle and swish seemed to have a sort of hypnotic effect on them both, for neither of

them spoke for a long time. Then Jack broke the silence.

"This monotony is getting on my nerves," he said in a low tense voice. "You're a wonder to me, Mary. I don't see how you can come back to such a deadly stupid place as this is, after the taste of gay times you've had, and settle down again as cheerfully as you do. It makes me desperate whenever I think that if it wasn't for my being in such a fix you needn't be tied here. You could be where you'd have the social opportunities you ought to have."

Mary looked up quickly. This tone of bitterness was a new note in Jack's speech. He had drawn his hat down over his eyes, and was gripping the arms of his chair with both hands, as if trying to keep his resentment against fate in check.

"Just let me tell you something," cried Mary, so anxious to smooth the grim lines of suffering out of the beloved face that she recklessly broke her resolution. *"I didn't have as good a time at that hop as I made out! The last part of it was perfectly ghastly, and I never want to go to another as long as I live!"*

Then, seeing the look of blank amazement that spread over Jack's face, she hastened to explain.

"Oh, it started out beautifully. I was simply ecstatic when we climbed out of the 'bus and were ushered into that long room with the flags and the evergreens, and the military music. And you already know how much it meant to me to have the General so nice to me and the officer of the day so attentive and complimentary; and how happy I was to have my programme filled up so that there was no danger of my being a wall-flower. I was having the loveliest time imaginable, when I went up to Gay to ask if any of the safety-pins showed below my girdle. The polo man I had met at dinner, that Mr. Mills, had been dancing with me, and, when he left me with Gay, went over to speak to a pretty butterfly sort of girl, a little brunette all in frilly pink and white; I'd been admiring her at a distance. Of course he didn't know his voice carried so far. He was protesting because she had left no place for him on her programme, and I heard him say:

"'It wasn't *my* fault that I didn't get to you in time. Bogey roped me in first thing for a turn with that kindergarten kid he's got in tow. She's Miss Melville's guest and I couldn't get out of it, but really, Juliet — *that was punishment enough* without your —'"

"I didn't hear the rest of it. Some people beside

me laughed just then and drowned his voice, but the girl looked over at me, and gave me a long, searching glance, sort of out of the corner of her eye, and then turned away with a little shrug of her shoulders and smiled up at him quite as if she agreed with him and had forgiven him because he had such a good excuse.

"I never had anything make me so uncomfortable in all my life as his speech and then her sidelong look and nasty little shrug. It was the *way* he said it, and the *way* she answered, that hurt. After that I never forgot for a moment that my dress was a borrowed one and that it didn't fit, and that I was the plain little country mouse that they were polite to, merely because I was Gay's guest and Lieutenant Boglin asked them to be. And I couldn't help feeling that every man who danced with me was as bored as Mr. Mills had been; even more so, for I had been perfectly natural and at ease when I was talking to him, and after I overheard his remark I was so stiff and self-conscious that such a state of mind was bound to have its effect all the rest of the evening. I was perfectly aware that I was boring my partners."

"But that was such a little thing to let spoil your whole evening," interrupted Jack. "It was awfully

rude of the fellow to make such a speech, but he probably said it just to square himself with the other girl. 'All's fair in love and war,' they say, and you don't know how much it might have meant to him to keep in her good graces. I don't believe he really meant it."

"Oh, I know better!" insisted Mary dismally. "He *did* mean it! I felt it!"

She slowly gathered up a handful of pebbles and sent them skipping across the water at intervals as she continued:

"It gave me the same sensation that I had years ago, when I had my first toy balloon. That is one of my earliest and most vivid recollections. One moment I was hugging it to me because it was such a dear, gay, red bubble, fairly entranced with the beauty of it. The next I was looking down in a scared, puzzled way at what was left — just a dull scrap of wrinkled rubber. That one remark and glance and shrug made all the pleasure ooze out of the evening as quickly as my hugging squeezed the air out of that collapsed balloon."

Jack smiled at her comparison. He remembered that time, and how they had all laughed at her bewildered expression when the balloon burst in her hands. She could not be convinced at first that her

beautiful, red bubble had ceased to be, and hopefully peered under tables and chairs, even while she held the wreck of it in her hands.

Jack had always been her comforter. He had dried her tears then with the promise of another balloon as soon as he could find the man who sold them, and now he hurried to lift the gloom that had settled down on her usually cheerful features. Having thrown away all her pebbles, she bunched herself up into a disconsolate little heap, on the boulder, her elbows on her knees, and her chin in her hand.

"No, it's no use your trying to comfort me," she said presently in response to his repeated attempts. "Every time I think about that evening I'm so mortified that I could cry. My mind's made up. I am a dead failure socially, and I never want to go to another function as long as I live!"

"You're a little goose! That's what you are," said Jack. "And I know what's at the root of the whole trouble. You've done a lot of imagining about your social career at one time and another. You've looked forward to it and seen yourself in the rôle of an irresistible charmer. You've felt like a dowager duchess inwardly, and forgotten that you've no marks outwardly to show that you've

grown up to take such a part. You have your own individual charm, but so far it is only the charm of an unsophisticated little school-girl, and naturally grown men find older girls more interesting, just as you would prefer Phil Tremont's company for instance, to that of little Billy Downs. But that's not saying that you dislike Billy Downs, or that he won't grow up to be a social lion some day. So may you. Now own up. You always have pictured yourself as cutting quite a wide swath on your first appearance in society, haven't you? That's one reason you were so disappointed at the hop."

"Well," admitted Mary, smiling in spite of herself, "I own I did expect to once, a long time ago, and maybe that had a sort of sub-conscious influence on me. It was when we first moved to Arizona. Hazel Lee and I found a book that a boarder had left behind in his tent. It was called 'The Lady Agatha's Career; A Novel.' We took it out on the desert, a little way, and spelled it out between us, sitting on the sand behind a clump of greasewood bushes, that hid us from view of the ranch house. Hazel was allowed only juvenile books, and she knew her mother would take this away from us on account of the word novel.

"It was such a horribly sentimental story that we

found it embarrassing to read the tenderest parts of it aloud, and I suppose because it was the first one of the kind we had ever come across, it made a deeper impression on us than it would have done otherwise. We fairly devoured it. For days we thought and talked of nothing else, and we used to take turns playing we were the Lady Agatha, about to burst on society like a dazzling star, and win the heart of the proud scion of the House of de Hoverly."

Jack threw back his head and laughed so heartily that Mary was forced to smile again herself, as she went on with her confession.

"That all came back to me the other night when we climbed out of the 'bus, and I almost giggled when I remembered that this was what Hazel and I had looked forward to as such a grand event — being escorted for the first time by a grown man. It was on a similar occasion that the Lady Agatha made such a hit in society. Our ideas of society were so crude and funny then," Mary went on, beginning to relish her own reminiscences. "All we knew about it we gathered from that book. It seemed to be made up principally of haughty earls and dowager duchesses who lived in castles and wore coronets. I didn't know what a dowager was

then, but I privately resolved to be one when I was grown. The name seemed so grand and high-sounding, and in the story they always had everything their own way. I couldn't help laughing a bit ago when you used the word, for you had hit the nail on the head."

"Then you won't mind when I say 'I told you so,'" laughed Jack. "If you hadn't gone that night expecting to create a sensation, you'd have been satisfied to have people nice to you simply because you were their friend's friend, and wouldn't have been so cut up over that remark you overheard."

"I'm not so sure about the last part," Mary insisted, her face clouding again. "It *was* nasty of him to say it, and the mere thought of that man will always be an abomination to me."

There was silence for a little while. Everything was so still that a bird hopped fearlessly out on a limb above them, and began to call to its mate. When Mary spoke again there was a whimsical expression on her face that soon reflected itself in Jack's.

"I can't help picturing things out beforehand, the way I'd like to have them be. I've done it all my life. The rehearsing is always more fun, though,

than the actual happening. Now when I went away to school last year, every time I'd wake up that last night in the sleeping-car, I'd plan just what I'd say and how I'd act to make my entrance to Warwick Hall imposing. I could actually see myself sweeping in to make a good impression on Madam Chartley, and you know what happened! My hat was cocked over one ear, the wire sticking out through the loops of ribbon, and Madam caught me jumping up and down to try every seat in the reception-room, one after the other."

Jack chuckled, glad to see some of Mary's cheerfulness returning.

"And then," she continued, "you remember when we met Phil and Elsie Tremont on the train, as we were going out to Arizona to live?"

Jack nodded.

"I was only nine years old then, but for weeks I thought of Phil as a sort of young god — a regular Apollo, and I pictured all sorts of scenes in which I should be a prominent personage at our next meeting. And when he *did* come I was sprinting down the road in a cloud of dust, hatless and breathless and purple in the face, crying, and crazy with fright, because I thought that a harmless old Indian who chanced to be riding down the same

road, was chasing me. How Phil does laugh every time that is mentioned!"

Mary was sitting up straight on the boulder now, her face dimpling as she recalled these various predicaments.

"Then there's the time the Little Colonel visited us at the Wigwam. Hadn't I dreamed of that first meeting for weeks — what we'd say and what she'd say? Me in my rosebud sash and best embroidered white gown. But she caught you and Joyce at the wash-tub, and I had to take my first peep at her, crouched down in an irrigating ditch on my way home from school, all inky and dirty and torn.

"But I don't think I've done quite so much romancing since Betty gave me my Good Times book and preached me that little sermon on being self-conscious," Mary chattered on. "She said that my always thinking of the impression I was making on people, and being so eager to please was what made me miserable when I fell short of my expectations. She said that I ought to copy Lloyd. That her greatest charm was her utter unconsciousness of self. I think that is Betty's too. She's *such* a darling."

There was no response to this. The mention of

Betty's name brought up so many pleasing scenes to Mary, that she sat living them over, unmindful of the long silence that fell between her and Jack. He sat with his hat pulled still farther over his eyes, in a revery as deep as hers. Betty's name recalled the picture that was often before him in these long, idle days. He was seeing her as he had seen her the first time, now over a year ago, when he made his memorable visit to Kentucky. She was standing at the end of the long locust avenue, all in white, between the stately white pillars, with her godmother's arm about her, as they awaited his approach.

Slim and girlish and winsomely sweet she was, and when he looked into her wistful brown eyes, he felt in some strange way that he had come to the end of all pilgrimage. The world held nothing beyond worth seeking for.

After a long time the swirl of the water past them was lost in the sound of a wagon, rattling noisily down the hill and across the ford. Then a long line of cattle passed down the same road, accompanied by the hoarse calls of their drivers on horseback. Mary looked up.

"Jack," she said hesitatingly, "did you ever hear this verse?

"'For should he come not by the road, and come not by the hill,
And come not by the far sea-way, yet come he surely will.
Close all the roads of all the world — *Love's road is open still.*'

"Do you believe that is true?"

"Not for me," he answered in a hoarse voice, so bitter, so resentful that it startled her, coming as it did after long silence. He gripped the arms of his chair again, as if in pain too great to endure, and then burst out vehemently, "*Every* road is closed to me now! It wouldn't be so hard if there was any prospect of the end coming soon, but I may have to hang on this way for years — just a living death! Caged in this helpless hulk of a body, a drag on every one and a misery to myself! *Heavens!* If I could only end it all!"

"Oh, Jack!" begged Mary, starting up, tears in her eyes. "Don't talk that way! You're not a drag on anybody! We couldn't live without you! You've been so brave — just like Aldebaran in the Jester's Sword. *'So bravely did he bear his lot, it seemed a kingly spirit dwelt among us!'* Don't you know that just having you with us is more to us than anything else in the whole world?"

She was fairly wringing her hands in her distress over this revelation of the overwhelming bitterness

of Jack's soul. For months he had been so cheerful, hiding his real feelings under a playfulness of manner, that it was a shock to her to find that his cheerfulness was only assumed. Because he "had met his hurt so bravely and made no sign" she, like the Jester, thought "the struggle had grown easier with time, and that he really felt the gladness that he feigned." Like the Jester, too, she was "at her wit's end for a reply." She could think of no word of comfort.

The loud halloo which sounded just then in a familiar voice from up the creek, was a welcome interruption. The next instant Norman came in sight around the curve. He was standing up in a flat-bottomed boat, poling down stream towards them, with the vigor and skill of a young Indian. It was a clumsy, home-made affair, with "The Swan" painted in blue letters on the side.

"She's mine for the winter!" he announced joyfully, as soon as he was within speaking distance. "A man who lives up past Klein's crossing rented it to me. I'm to chop wood awhile every Saturday to pay for the use of it."

Norman was so interested in his new possession that he could not see that he had interrupted a conversation of tragic seriousness.

"Come on and get in, Mary," he urged. "It's great. Beats those old rafts you used to pole at Lee's ranch, all hollow. Don't you want to try it?"

Mary hesitated. To go off and leave Jack sitting on the creek-bank, unable to accompany her, would emphasize his crippled condition. To refuse to leave him would only be added proof in his present sensitive mood that he was a "drag on every one."

"The sun is dropping so low we ought to be starting home before it begins to get chilly," she said with a meaning glance towards Jack, which to her relief Norman interpreted aright. He answered cheerfully,

"Oh, go on! It's a cinch *you* won't get chilly if you push that old boat along as fast as I did, and if we get cold waiting for you, it won't be many minutes till we'll be 'seen, a-rolling down the Bowling Green' towards home."

"All right, then," said Mary, climbing in as he climbed out to hold the boat steady for her. "I won't go far, but I'm surely glad to get out on the water again."

She took the oar he handed her, and with a skilful push against the bank she sent the boat gliding

out into the stream. As she went off she thought: "That was considerate of Norman, to put it the way he did — to include Jack with himself as a matter of course, and not to remind him of his helplessness by saying he'd stay and take care of him. Norman has lots of tact for a boy of his age; more than I have. I must have hurt Jack many a time by my inconsiderate speeches, but I had no idea he felt so horribly sensitive about being dependent."

All the way up the creek she was so occupied with thinking of what Jack had said, and so depressed over the depths of mental suffering which his exclamations revealed, that she plied her oar mechanically, only partly awake to the scenes about her. But the long even strokes, first on one side and then the other, sent her darting forward through the water so rapidly that she soon reached a turn in the creek which she had never passed before, and as she rounded the curve such a beautiful sight greeted her that she cried out in pleased surprise, "How perfectly *heavenly!*"

On one side the bank towered up into a high, steep cliff, straight as a wall. It was completely covered with ferns; delicate, feathery maiden-hair ferns, as luxuriantly green as in mid-summer. In

this sheltered spot they were still left untouched by the frost, although it was now December. Everywhere else vegetation was dry and sere, but the green freshness of this bank was accounted for by a number of tiny water-falls splashing down from unseen springs above, and sending a light spray in every direction, as fine as mist.

"I'm coming straight back here in the morning," she said to herself, "and dig up a lot of these ferns before the frost gets them. I can't think of anything lovelier to send to Gay for a Christmas greeting than a clump of them growing in a box — a rustic box covered with bark and dainty lichens. One would be nice for Mrs. Rochester, too. She's just the kind that would appreciate such a gift. Well, that solves two of my hardest problems of what to give." That trip up the creek in *The Swan* was a voyage of discovery in more ways than one, for Mary came upon the fact that she had grown older in the last quarter of an hour, quite as suddenly and unexpectedly as she had come upon the fern-bank. That cry of Jack's, "Heavens! If I could only end it all!" had shocked her into a deeper understanding of pain, and human limits of endurance.

She had always prided herself on her ability to

imagine herself in other people's places, and until now had believed that she fully understood and appreciated the depths of Jack's suffering. Now she saw that she had not even begun to fathom it. His bravery had deceived her. All the while that she had been thinking that he was growing accustomed to his lot and that time was making it easier for him to bear, a fire of rebellion was smouldering fiercely within him, making each day one of new torture.

Because she could plaster up her own small hurts with platitudes and proverbs, and ease her disappointments by counting her blessings "as one would count the beads upon a rosary" she had vainly imagined that all this would be balm for him. How many times she had offered him such comfort, feeling with childish complacency that she was helping to ease his pain. She understood now. A sugar-plum may help one to forget a bee-sting, but a death-thrust is another matter.

Absorbed in her thoughts, she sent the boat down stream with long, swift strokes, not noticing how fast it was going. Helped by the current, she came in sight of Jack and Norman before she had mentally adjusted herself to her new view-point. She was afraid that as soon as she and Jack were left

"She sent the boat down stream
with long swift strokes."

MARY HARE IN TEXAS

alone again they would find themselves facing the same wall of blank despair, and she dreaded it. So to gain time, she began calling to them about the wonderful bank of ferns she had discovered, and made several awkward thrusts of the oar in an attempt to land, before she finally ran the boat up on the bank.

But Norman did not leave them alone. Deciding that that secluded spot would be a good place to chain the boat, and that it was time to be doing his evening chores, he slipped the padlock key in his pocket and handed the oar over to Mary, saying, "You carry this and I'll wheel the chair."

Jack had taken a new grip on his courage, and if Mary could have but known it, it was by the help of one of the very means she had branded as futile, a few moments before. The sight of the bloodstone on his watch-fob, as he glanced at the time, recalled the story of the poor Jester who had been born in Mars month, like himself, and for that reason had cause to claim undaunted courage as the "jewel of his soul." The merest flicker of a smile crossed Jack's grimly-set lips as he looked down at the bloodstone and thought of all it stood for; and pulling himself together he whispered the Jester's

vow between clenched teeth: "I'll keep my oath until the going down of one more sun."

When Mary joined them he was chaffing Norman quite as usual, and immediately began to joke about the awkward landing she had made. On the way home Norman laughed often, thinking that Jack was in one of his jolliest moods; but Mary walked beside them, the oar over her shoulder, saying to herself, "And under all this brave show, *he's feeling every minute that he'd be glad to die!*"

When she reached the house Mrs. Ware met them at the door, and Mary, passing in quietly as Norman began telling about the boat, suddenly remembered that that was not the natural way for her to come home. Whenever she had any news she fairly tumbled into the house in her haste to tell it. The boys knew that she had discovered the bank of ferns, and that it was as exciting as Norman's discovery of a boat, because it would provide some of her Christmas presents without cost. Yet here she was walking in as calmly as if she were fifty years old and had outgrown her girlish enthusiasms. It certainly was not natural.

So she turned back and interrupted Norman, because that was what she always did when she was in a hurry to tell things, and she tried to make her

description as full of life and color as she usually did; but all the time she had a feeling that she was acting.

Mrs. Ware expressed her interest with many pleased exclamations as she always did when Mary came to her with any new-found cause for rejoicing, but Mary, suddenly grown keen of vision, saw the look of anxiety and weariness that seemed to lie in the back of her eyes behind the smile. "I wonder," she mused, "if mamma is acting, too, if her gladness is only on the surface, and she smiles to keep up her courage and ours, as they say little boys whistle in the dark. Oh, it's dreadful to grow up if one has to lose faith in this being a good old world. It used to seem so happy all the time, and now it's all so sorrowful and out of joint."

She went into her room to wash her hands and get an apron before going out into the kitchen to help prepare supper. As she stood tying the apron-strings, she looked up at Lloyd Sherman's picture which hung over her bed, as it used to hang in Warwick Hall and at Lone Rock, when she pretended that it was Lloyd's *shadow-self,* the chum to whom she could carry all her troubles, sure of silent sympathy. But somehow, while the beautiful eyes smiled down into hers as kindly as they had always

done, they did not bring the sense of her presence. They did not speak to her as they had done those other times when she turned to them for the imagined communion that always brightened her spirits.

"It's never seemed the same since I knew she was engaged," Mary thought with a sigh. "Of course I know she's just as fond of me as she was before, but I can't help feeling that she's so taken up with other things now, her life so heavenly full since she has found her prince, that she *can't* take the same interest in my affairs."

As she passed the mirror she turned back for a second glance. The first had shown her the fresh unlined face of a girl of seventeen, but judging by the way she felt she was sure there should be wrinkles. The weight of world-weariness and disillusionment and foreboding which depressed her, certainly could not belong to youth. They must be the property of an old woman, in her sixties at least.

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTMAS

Ten days before Christmas Mary opened the bottom drawer of her bureau, in which she had placed each gift as soon as it was finished, and sitting down on the floor beside it, proceeded to take an inventory of the packages within. They were all wrapped, stamped and addressed, but she had made them ready without a single Christmas thrill. There was nothing in the climate or surroundings to suggest the holiday season, and she compared this year's preparations with the year before at Warwick Hall, when the very air seemed charged with a spirit of delightful expectancy; when everybody had secrets and went around smiling and humming snatches of carols which the choir-girls were practising for the service in the chapel.

Mechanically she counted the bundles and checked them off her list: the ones for Holland, for Joyce, for Eugenia, the bunny doll with the chamois skin head which she had made for little

Patricia. She was very well satisfied with them all, as well as with the fancy trifles she had made for Lloyd and Betty and the girls at school, with whom she still kept up a correspondence. They were inexpensive, but they were original and appropriate.

Allowing for the crowded condition of the mails, she decided that the packages which had the longest distance to go should be started that very day. These she took from the drawer and piled on her bed, and then got out her pen to begin the writing of her Christmas letters.

Now one may make all sorts of dainty gifts, and tie them with holly ribbon, and send them away in Christmasy looking packages which will bring a glow to the heart of the one who opens them, and yet do it all without one spark of festal feeling herself. But it is impossible to write a Christmas letter and put the proper zest into its greetings, unless one is a-tingle with it. When Mary discovered that fact, she tore up the sheets on which she had made various beginnings, and put the cork in her ink-bottle.

"I can't do it any more than I could keep Thanksgiving on the Fourth of July or New Year's on April Fool's day," she thought. "Luckily the letters travel faster than second-class mail, so I'll

take my packages to the post-office now, and then go out in the boat awhile, and think about snow and sleigh-bells and holly berries till I work myself up to the proper mood."

As she started out of the door her mother called to her to remind her that they needed eggs. That meant that Mary was to go around by the Metz place to get them on her way home, which would take so much longer that there wouldn't be much time for meditation in the boat. But it was in going for the eggs that she came across the very inspiration of which she was in quest.

Mr. Metz and his wife were sitting on a bench in the sunny garden near the kitchen door, when Mary opened the gate. Looking up the path between the stiff rows of coxcombs and prince's feather, she could see that the old lady was knitting, as usual. He sat with a newspaper across his knees, and his spectacles folded in one hand. The other grasped the end of his long white beard which flowed almost to his lap.

They were both singing; singing with the quavering voices of age, a song which they had brought with them from their far away youth in the beloved Fatherland. It was a song of Christmas joy which they had carolled many a time

around a candle-lighted tree. Their voices were thin and tremulous, and broke now and then on the high notes, but it was a gay little tune, very sweet and full of cheer; and Mary, who stopped to listen just inside the gate, was thankful that they had not heard the latch click. When it came to an end she waited a moment, hoping there would be another verse, but they began to talk, and she started on up the path. But halfway to the house she paused again, for they had begun another song.

"Am Weinachtsbaum die Lichter brennen!"

Their voices came to a sudden stop at the end of that line, however, as they became aware of an approaching visitor. Mary hurried forward saying, "Oh, I understood one word of it. You were singing about a Christmas tree, weren't you? The children in the blue cottages across from us have been talking about a 'Weinachtsbaum' all week. Please don't stop. It sounded so sweet as I came in at the gate."

At some other time the old couple might have been hard to persuade, but the holiday season was their high-tide of the year, and its return always swept them along with a rush of happy memories, to a state of enjoyment that was almost childish in its outward manifestation. Finding that Mary

was really interested in hearing them talk of the customs of their youth, they began a series of reminiscences so interesting that she could have listened all day.

Seventy Christmases they could remember distinctly, besides the dim impressions of several earlier ones. In the course of describing them it came about quite naturally that they should sing her the interrupted song.

The old man, because he spoke better English than his wife, interpreted the verses first. But even his speech was halting and broken, and he pulled his white beard desperately, and used many despairing gestures when he could not find the right word. She, clicking her needles, kept up a constant nodding while he explained.

"On the Christmas tree the lights are burning. The children gaze at the what you call it — picture — scene — till the eye laughs and the heart laughs and the old look Himmelwartz, heavenwards that means, with blessed rapture."

"Yah, yah!" nodded the old wife, prompting him as he paused. "Zwei Engel" —

"Two angels appear," he repeated, going haltingly on with the next verse. Mary could not understand all that he tried to convey, but she

caught the meaning of the last part, that the day brings God's blessing to young and old alike, to the white as well as the brown hair.

"It is the same all over the world," he said, clearing his throat preparatory to singing the lines he had just translated.

"We will be alone this year. We cannot go to our children and they cannot come to us. But we shall not feel alone. We will make ready one little tree, and in our hearts we will join hands with all the happy ones who greet the *Weinachtsbaum*. We will be part of that circle which reaches around the whole wide world."

The quavering old voices took up the tune, and although Mary recognized only three words, Christmas-tree, angels and heavenward, there was something in the zest with which they sung it, something in the expression of the wrinkled old faces, which gave her the inspiration she was in search of. It was as if she had brought to them a little unlighted candle, and they had kindled it at the flame of their own glowing ones.

When Mary went home she was more like her accustomed self than she had been for days. She went dancing into the house with the eggs, and immediately set about the writing of her Christmas

letters in her usual resourceful way. Mrs. Ware looked up, much amused, to see her piling some fresh orange peel and bits of broken cedar on the table beside her ink-bottle.

"There's nothing like that combination of smells to make you think that Santa Claus is coming straight down the chimney," exclaimed Mary gravely, catching her mother's amused glance. "You may think it is foolish, but really it makes all the Christmases I have ever known stand right up in a row in front of me, whenever I smell that smell."

She rubbed a bit of the fresh peel and then a piece of the cedar between her palms to bring out the pungent fragrance, and afterwards, from time to time, bent over it for another whiff to bring her new inspiration.

By the twentieth of December the last letter and the last out-of-town package but one was started on its way. Gay's box of ferns, a mass of luxuriant, feathery greenness, sat on a window-sill, waiting for its time to go. The crate in which it was to be shipped stood ready in the wood-shed, even to the address on the express-tag. Then time began to drag. The next two days, although the shortest in the year, seemed many times longer than usual.

"It's like trying to keep things hot when somebody is late and keeps dinner waiting," complained Mary. "If you can't eat when it's all ready, some of the things are sure to dry up and some to get cold. I was worked up to quite a festive state of mind day before yesterday, but my enthusiasm is all drying up and cooling off now."

"Here's something to warm it over again," announced Norman, coming in from the express office with a box on his shoulder. "Here's the first gift to arrive. Let's open up right now, and open each thing that comes after this *when* it comes instead of waiting for one grand surprise on Christmas morning. You never will try my way, and it would spread the pleasure out and make it last lots longer if you only would. You're bound to get more enjoyment out of each thing if you give your undivided attention to it."

For once Norman's suggestion, made yearly, was not opposed, and as he pried the lid off the box Mary flopped down on the floor beside it, Jack wheeled his chair closer, and Mrs. Ware came in from the next room in answer to their eager calls that it was from Joyce.

Each one of the studio family had contributed to the filling of the box. The holly-wreaths on top,

tied with great bows of wide red ribbon, were from Miss Henrietta Robbins.

"Don't you know," exclaimed Mary, as she lifted them out and held them up for them all to admire, "that Miss Henrietta has turned that studio into a perfect bower of Christmas greens? She gives it all the elegant costly touches that Joyce never could afford, just as she's put the finishing touch on these wreaths with this beautiful ribbon. It's wide enough and satiny enough for a sash."

"And isn't it just like little Mrs. Boyd to send *this!*" she cried a moment later, when the opening of a fancy pasteboard box revealed a doll about six inches long, dressed like a ballet dancer. Its fluffy scarlet skirts hid the leaves of a needle-book, concealed among its folds, and from the ends of the sash, by which it was intended to dangle, hung a tiny emery bag in the shape of a strawberry, and a little silk thimble-case.

"She got the idea for that from the Ladies' Home Magazine, I am sure. She adores the pages that tell how to evolve your entire spring outfit from a shoe-string and a strip of left-over embroidery. It's not that she's trying to economize. Joyce says she has the piece-bag habit. The girls tease her

about not being able to see a scrap of goods without wishing to find some way to use it, but they love the homey flavor her home-made things give to the house. She is as old-fashioned and dear in her ways as she is in her ideas of art."

"That is an unusually pretty doll," remarked Mrs. Ware as Mary swung it around by its sash.

"Yes," she answered, "its the kind Hazel Lee and I were always wishing for. Ours were flaxen haired, and this has raven curls. We would have called her 'Lady Agatha' if we had had her then. I believe I'll name her that now," she added with a glance towards Jack to see if he understood the allusion.

But Jack was not noticing. He was turning the pages of a handsomely illustrated work on Geology, a book he had long wanted to own. Joyce had had little to spend this year compared with last, but in her hurried shopping expeditions, she had considered the tastes and needs of each one so well that every gift was hailed with delight.

"Norman's way is a dandy one," acknowledged Mary, as she opened a box of fine stationery engraved with her monogram, the first she had ever owned. "Now I can write my note to Gay on this. If we had waited I should have had to use the com-

mon paper that we buy at the drug-store by the pound, because it is cheap. And it's so nice too, to have these holly-wreaths beforehand."

She danced away to hang them in the windows, and to swing the Lady Agatha from a corner of the mirror over her bureau, where her hidden needle-book could readily be reached. Then she thriftily gathered up every bit of ribbon and tinsel from the discarded wrappings, smoothed out the tissue paper and picked loose from it all the adhering seals that had not been broken in the process of tearing open the packages.

"Here's seven whole seals with holly on them," she announced to her mother, "six with Santa Claus heads and four with the greeting Merry Christmas. I'm going to use them over again in doing up the rest of my packages. That box that the doll came in is exactly what I want to put the candy in that I made for the Barnabys. And that plain one that holds the stuffed dates that Lucy Boyd sent will do for the candy I'm going to send Mr. and Mrs. Metz. All I'll need to do is to cover it with some of this holly paper and tie it with the same gold cord. I'll find a use for nearly everything I've saved before the week is over."

She said it in a tone of such deep satisfaction

that Norman looked up from the book and other gifts in which he had seemed absorbed, to laugh at her.

"Mary is like that old woman who wrote those recipes for cheap pies in that old New England cook-book we have at home," he said to his mother. "She thinks 'a little Ingenuity added to almost any material that comes to hand will make a tasty pie!' You ought to send the Ladies' Home Magazine some pointers, Mary, on '*How to make Christmas gifts for others on the wrappings of those sent you.*' Didn't some one say something about the *scrap-bag* habit awhile ago?"

Mary's only answer was a saucy grimace. She could afford to let him tease her about her squirrel instinct for hoarding, when it gave her so much satisfaction to add to her store of scraps. She had all sorts of things to draw on in emergencies. In the one month they had been in Bauer she had nearly filled a shoe-box with odds and ends. She had sheets of tin-foil, saved from packages of chocolate, picture cards, little bottles and boxes and various samples of toilet articles sent out by firms who advertise their goods in that way.

For the next two days every mail brought greetings and remembrances to some one of the family,

sometimes to all, so that the hours slipped by at a fairly rapid pace. One of the gifts which gave Mary most pleasure was the chiffon scarf that Lloyd sent. It was like the one Roberta wore the first evening Mary had seen her, and which she rapturously compared to "a moonbeam spangled with dew-drops," only she thought hers far lovelier than Roberta's. A dozen times a day she slipped into her room to take the floating, filmy web from its box, and spread it out to gloat over it. She had to try the effects of different lights on it, sunshine and moonlight and the rays of the lamp. She spread it over different dresses, white, pink and green, to see which produced the prettiest glimmers, and Norman caught her once posing before a mirror with it draped over head, and teased her all the rest of the evening.

Betty's gift was a simple, inexpensive one, intended merely as a greeting. It was only a green bay-berry candle, but the card tied to it by a scarlet bow bore the verse:

> "This bay-berry candle's tongue of flame
> Bears message. Prithee hear it!
> *While it burns mid your Christmas greens*
> *I'm with you all in spirit!*"

"I'm glad that it's a big fat candle," said Mary, passing it around for each one to enjoy

the spicy, aromatic fragrance. "It'll burn a long time."

She lighted it Christmas eve and put it in the centre of the table with one of the holly-wreaths laid around the base, and the tongue of flame did seem to "bear message." It started Mary to talking of her absent friend; of the bloodstone and the Good Times book Betty had given her. Of Betty's dear brown eyes and dearer ways, of Betty's sweet consideration for others, of her talent for writing which was sure to make her famous some day. She talked of her all during supper, not noticing that Jack was unusually silent, and that his eyes rested oftener on the candle than it did on his plate.

As they left the table Mr. Metz appeared at the door like a veritable old Santa Claus, with his long white beard and eyes a-twinkle. In one arm he carried a big round hat-box full of nuts, in the other two bottles of home-made wine. His own pecan trees and vineyard had furnished his offering. He thanked them so volubly in his broken way for the little gifts that Norman had carried over when he went for the milk, and delivered his nuts and wine with such benign smiles and a flow of good wishes from his wife and himself, that

Mary gave a skip of pleasure when she closed the door after him. She went back to the kitchen singing:

"'Now jingle, jingle, come Kris Kringle!' Oh, I feel as if the old fellow himself had really been here. He and Betty's candle have given me a real Night - before - Christmas-and-all-through-the-house feeling. It's lovely!"

They had had supper so early that it was barely dusk outdoors when she and Norman started to take the box of ferns to the rectory. When they had passed the cotton field, the bend in the road soon brought them to the edge of the village, and the beginning of the short thoroughfare which led to the main street, past the cotton-gin and the Free Camp-yard.

The Free Camp-yard was always an interesting place to both of them, and they never passed it without looking in. It was a large lot surrounded by a high board fence. Low sheds were built along one side within the enclosure, in which both men and beasts might find shelter in time of storm. Usually they slept in the open, however, with little campfires here and there to boil their coffee and give them light. Peddlers, hucksters and belated country people were its usual patrons. But some-

times one saw a family of armadillo hunters on their way to the curio dealers, with crates full of the queer nine-banded shells which can be made into baskets, simply by tying the head and tail together.

One evening Mary saw two country belles, putting the finishing touches to their toilets behind a wagon, by the aid of a pocket-mirror. They had come in for one of the Saturday night balls, held regularly in the town hall. The week before, part of a disbanded freak show had taken refuge in the camp-yard. Norman, peeping through a knot-hole, the gate being shut, had seen the Armless Man scratch a match and light a fire with his toes.

It was deserted tonight, except for a dilapidated covered wagon which had driven in a few minutes before. It was drawn by a big bony horse and a dejected little burro, and piled high with household goods. A gaunt, rough-looking man with a week's stubble of red beard on his chin, was beginning to unhitch. His wife, who was only a young thing, and pretty in a worn, faded way, put down the sleeping baby that she had been holding, and stretched her arms wearily. She seemed too tired and listless to move till one of the two children, who were climbing down over the wheel, fell and began to whimper. A pair of hounds that had

trailed along behind dropped down under the wagon as if they had followed a long way and were utterly exhausted.

"Did you ever see anything so forlorn in all your life!" exclaimed Norman as they passed on. "And Christmas eve, too. I don't suppose those poor little kids will have a thing."

"No, I suppose not," answered Mary. "It seems a shame, too, when there'll probably be a tree in every house in Bauer. Mrs. Metz says that is one custom that they keep up here as faithfully as they do in the old country. Even the poorest families will manage to get one somehow."

"Those were cute kids," Norman went on, too much interested in what he had just seen to put the subject by. "That oldest little girl with the yellow curls looked like a big doll, and the little one is almost as pretty."

He spoke of them again on the way back, after they had left the ferns at the rectory, and turned homeward. The lights were beginning to twinkle all down the long street. In every house they passed, where the shades had not been drawn, they could see a tree, standing all ready for the lighting, from gift-laden base to top-most taper. As they drew near the camp-yard again they saw the red-

whiskered man going into the corner grocery with a tin pail on his arm. At the camp-yard gate they looked in. A small fire had been started, over which a battered coffee-pot had been set to boil. The burro and the bony horse were munching fodder near the wagon, but the woman and the children had disappeared.

"There they are," whispered Mary, pointing down the road a little way to a group standing in front of the pretty green and white cottage next to the cotton gin. The lace curtains had been dropped over the windows, but they did not hide the gay scene within. The family was having its celebration early, because the two small lads for whom it was designed were so young that their bedtime came early. They were handsome little fellows, one in kilts and the other just promoted to trousers. The gifts hanging from the lighted boughs were many and costly. The two little ones outside looking in, had never seen anything so fine and beautiful before, and stood gazing in round-eyed wonder. Attracted by the music they had strayed down from the camp-yard, and their mother had followed with the sleeping baby thrown across her shoulder, to bring them back. Now she, too, stood and stared.

The phonograph was still playing when Mary

and Norman reached the gate, so they paused to listen, also, more interested in the watchers outside however, than the revellers within.

Presently Mary turned to the woman, saying, "It's pretty, *isn't* it?" in such a friendly way that her remark called out an equally friendly response, and in a few moments she had learned what she wanted most to know about the strangers. They were moving on to the next county, having already been two days and a night on the road. Her man thought he could find work in the cedar brakes.

They stood talking until the phonograph stopped, then a glance over her shoulder told the woman that her husband was returning to the wagon, and she turned to go. The children were loath to leave, however.

"It's their first sight of Sandy Claws," she remarked as if to explain their unwillingness. Then as one of them stumbled and caught at her skirts she added impatiently, "I reckon it's likely to be your last. He don't care anything for the likes of *us*."

It was said so bitterly, that as Norman trudged on in the opposite direction with his sister, he exclaimed in a regretful tone, "It's too bad that we didn't find out about them sooner, in time to fix

something for them. It sort of spoils my own Christmas to think of those kids going without."

"They are not going without," replied Mary promptly, who had been thinking rapidly as she walked. "We've got to get something ready for them before they shut their eyes tonight."

"Huh, I'd like to know how you'll do it this late," Norman answered.

She laughed in reply, saying teasingly, "Who was it said that 'A little Ingenuity added to almost any material that comes to hand will make a tasty pie?' Well, it will make a tasty tree too. If you'll help I'll have one ready in an hour."

His skeptical "I don't believe it! Why, you *can't!*" was all she needed to start her to working out her resolution with the force of a young whirlwind. She could plan with lightning-like rapidity when any need arose.

"I said if you'd all help," she reminded him.

As soon as he had expressed a hearty willingness to do anything he could to carry "Sandy Claws" to the camp-yard, she began.

"The minute we get home, you hack off one of the bottom branches of that cedar tree outside the gate; a good bushy one about three feet high. Put it into the box that Joyce's presents came in, and

nail it in place with cleats made from the lid. Better weight it with some stones in the bottom, and we can tack green crêpe paper all over the base. We've nothing but ordinary white candles, but we can cut them in two, and wire them on with hairpins, and cover the pins with tinfoil out of my scrap-box that you make so much fun of. That will be *your* part.

" There's some corn already popped, waiting till I get back, to be made into balls. I'll get mamma to string it instead, and Jack to make a lot of little gilt cornucopias out of some stuff I've saved. I'm sure he'll donate the candy cane Joyce sent as a joke, although he is so fond of old-fashioned striped peppermint sticks. We'll break it up into short pieces and hang that on. And we can tie up a few dates and nuts into tiny packages. There are fancy papers and ribbons galore in that aforesaid scrap-box. I'll think of more after we get started. Come on, let's race the rest of the way. The one who gets there first can tell the others."

Norman reached the front door several yards ahead of Mary, but he did not claim his privilege. He merely rushed into the kitchen for a hatchet, calling as he dashed out again, " Sixty minutes to make a Christmas tree in! Everybody get to

work." Mary did not stop to take off her hat. Throwing off her coat, she began talking "on the bounce" as Jack said, for she hurried from one room to the other, explaining at the top of her voice, while she gathered up pop-corn, scrap-box, paste-tube and scissors. Her enthusiasm was so contagious, her description of the camp-yard pilgrims so appealing, that by the time she had finished her breathless account of them Jack had begun cutting squares of gilt paper and Mrs. Ware was stringing corn as if they were working to win a wager.

The race against time was the most exciting experience they had had in Bauer. They watched the clock with many laughing exclamations, but were working too fast to talk much. In twenty minutes Norman brought in a shapely little tree firmly fastened on a green base. In thirty minutes more the candles were wired in place; a few skilful twists had turned part of the tinfoil into silvery ornaments to hang beneath, while the rest had gone to the making of a great star to blaze on the topmost bough. White strings of pop-corn were festooned around it like garlands of snow. Every branch was bright with gilt and silver and blue and red packages, holding only a nut or a sweet-

meat it is true, but adding much to the gay attire of the tree.

A little pocket-mirror flashed from one bough, a fancy sample bottle of perfume hung from another. A miniature cake of scented soap and many fluttering picture cards bore witness to the resources of the scrap-box. Then exclaiming over a sudden happy thought Mary darted into the bedroom and took down Lady Agatha. Three snips of the scissors robbed her of the needle book hidden under her fluffy scarlet skirts and of the emery bag and thimble case tied to her sash ends, and left her no longer useful; only so ornamental that any little girl would have been glad to take her to her arms and affection.

"I know Mrs. Boyd wouldn't mind my passing it on to those children," Mary said as she tied it to one of the highest branches, "if she knew that it makes me happy as well as them."

"But," asked Norman, "what if Goldilocks and her sister both want to play with it at the same time? What will the left-out one do?"

Mary thought an instant and then flew to the tray of her trunk to snatch out a woolly toy lamb, that had fallen to her lot from the mock Christmas tree at Warwick Hall.

"I brought it down to Texas with me because Dorene said that 'everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go.' I expected to keep it always as a reminder of that lovely evening, but —" with a half stifled sigh, "it will do them more good than me."

When that was in place she gave one last glance around the room to see what else she could appropriate. Her eyes fell on the holly wreaths.

"Those red bows will make lovely hair-ribbons," she cried. "We can spare two of them. Hurry, mamma, and help me untie them! The needle-book may as well go to. Pin it on, Norman, and stick a date in the thimble bag and swing it up, Jack."

In the meantime Norman had been lighting the candles in order that they might see how it looked when it was all ashine, and it stood now, a very creditable and a very bright little tree. There were none of the spun-glass birds and crystal icicles and artificial fruits that had made little Patricia's tree such a gorgeous affaïr the year before, and were probably making it beautiful to-night, but there was sparkle and color and glow and charm of beribboned packages, enough to make little eyes who saw such a sight for the first time believe that it was the work of magic hands.

"Done!" cried Mary triumphantly, "and in only fifty-eight minutes!"

"Well, I didn't believe it would be possible," acknowledged Norman. "I'll bet it's the only tree in Texas trimmed in such short order."

When he and Mary reached the camp-yard again, they found the family sitting around the smouldering fire, listening to the phonograph which was still playing in the cottage down the road. The quilts were spread out in the wagon, ready for the night, but the children, who had slept most of the afternoon on their tiresome journey, could not be induced to climb in while the music lasted.

The two bearers of Yule-tide cheer set the tree down and reconnoitered through cracks in the fence. "The man looks awfully down in the mouth," whispered Norman. "So does she. Shall we tell them 'Sandy Claws' sent it?"

"No," Mary whispered back. "They look so forlorn and friendless, and the woman seemed to feel so left out of everything, that it might do them good to tell them we brought it because the angels sang peace on earth, good-will to men, and that it's a sort of sign that they're *not* left out. They're to have a part in it too."

Norman turned his eye from the knot-hole to

gape at her. "Well!" was his whispered ejaculation. "If you want all *that* said you'll have to say it yourself. I'm no preacher."

"Come on then," said Mary boldly. She knew what she wanted to convey to them but the words stuck in her throat, and she never could remember afterwards exactly what she blurted out as they put the tree down in front of the astonished family and then turned and ran. However, her words must have carried some of the good cheer she intended, for when she and Norman paused again outside, she at the knot-hole this time and he at the crack, it gave them each a queer little flutter inside to see the expression on the pleased faces and hear their exclamations of wonder.

"They couldn't be more surprised if it had dropped right down out of the sky," whispered Norman. "Now the kids are getting over their daze a bit. They're hopping around just like they saw the Kramer boys do."

"See, they've found Lady Agatha," answered Mary. "Just *look* at Goldilocks now! Did you ever see such an ecstatic little face. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Now they've got the lamb. I'm so glad I thought of it, for the Kramers

had a whole bunch of little white sheep around the base of their tree."

They were both very quiet when they finally turned away from the fence and started home. They did not speak till they reached the white moonlighted road, stretching past the cotton field. Then Mary looked up at the stars saying reverently, "Somehow I feel as if we'd been taking part in the *first* Christmas. It was a sort of camp-yard that the Star of Bethlehem led to. Don't you remember, 'there was no room in the inn' for the Child and His mother? It was a manger the gold and frankincense and myrrh were carried to. I feel as if we'd been following along — a little way at least — on the trail of the Wise Men."

"Me too," confessed Norman. Then nothing more was said for a long time. Mary could find no words for the next thoughts which puzzled her. She was picturing all the Christmas trees of the world brought together in one place, and trying to imagine the enormous forest they would make. Then she fell to wondering what it was about them that should make "the eye laugh and the heart laugh, and bring a blessing to the silver hair as well as brown" as the old couple had sung in the garden. All over the world it was so.

Since looking into the windows at other peoples' trees, and then causing one to bloom and bear fruit herself for the homeless campers, she felt that she had joined hands with that circle which reaches around the world. She was no longer an alien and stranger among the people of Bauer. The "Weinachtsbaum" had given her a happy bond of understanding and kinship. It had taken the hard, hopeless look out of the older faces around the camp-fire, for awhile at least, and made the little ones radiant. And at home — she remembered gratefully how Jack had burst out whistling several times while he helped to trim it. And the tune that came in such lusty, rollicking outbursts was one which he never whistled except when he was in high good humor with himself and all the universe. She was sure that he wasn't acting then — he couldn't have been just pretending that he was glad, for it sounded as it always used to do back at the Wigwam. She wondered why the tree had had that effect.

And then, like an answer, a verse popped into her thoughts; one that she had spelled out long ago for Grandmother Ware, letter by letter, one little finger pointing to each in turn. It was a verse from Revelation, about the tree that stands on either

side of the river, clear as crystal, "*which bare twelve manner of fruit, and the leaves were for the healing of the nations.*"

Then all of a sudden she understood why those shining boughs with their strange fruitage of gifts have power to bring hope and good cheer to lonely hearts the world over. They are the symbols, which the Spirit of Christmas sets ashine, of that Tree of Life. And the Spirit of Christmas is only another name for Love, and it is Love alone, the human and divine together, which can bring about the healing needed by hearts in every nation.

All this did not come to Mary in words. She could not have expressed it to any one else, but it sent her on her way, deeply, quietly glad.

Next morning while she was stooping before the oven, basting the turkey which the Barnabys had sent with their greetings, Jack called her to the front window where he was sitting.

A covered wagon was creaking slowly by, drawn by a big horse and a little burro. The cover was looped up, and in the back end, carefully tied to the tail-gate, stood the tree which had taken them fifty-eight minutes to prepare, but whose memory would not be effaced in that many years from the minds of the two children, seated on the quilts beside it.

"I'm so glad you got to see them," said Mary. "Aren't they dear? And oh, look! Goldilocks is still holding Lady Agatha, and the other one's hugging the woolly lamb!"

When the wagon was entirely out of sight Mary started back to her turkey basting, but stopped a moment to take another look at the gifts spread out on the side table. Several things had been added to them that morning; a dissected puzzle picture which Norman had made for her, a spool case that Jack had whittled out, and a strip of exquisitely embroidered rosebuds that Mrs. Ware had wrought to be put into a white dress. There was also a pot of white hyacinths from the rectory, and Mary held her face down against the cool snow of their blossoms, taking in their sweetness in long breaths.

"It's been a pretty full Christmas, hasn't it!" exclaimed Jack as he watched her.

"It's really been one of the nicest I ever had," she answered, "for one reason because it's lasted so long. Norman's plan is a success."

That night after supper Norman insisted on taking his mother down into the village to look at the lighted windows. After they had gone Mary took out her Good Times book to record the hap-

penings of the day. She had a few more notes of acknowledgment to write also, and was glad that Jack was busy with his own writing. She noticed that he was using India ink and a crow-quill pen, but thought nothing of that as he was always experimenting with them.

Joyce was not the only one of the children who had inherited artistic ability. Jack never attempted pictures, but he did beautiful lettering; odd initials and old English script, and had copied verses for calendars and fly-leaf inscriptions. Joyce said some of his pen-and-ink work was as beautifully done as the letters she had seen in old missals, made by the monks.

Nearly an hour went by. Mary addressed her last envelope. He laid down his pen and pushed a narrow strip of cardboard towards her.

"I've made you one more present to end the day with, Mary," he said jokingly. "It's a book-mark."

Inside a narrow border of conventional scroll-work was one line, and the line was from the verse which she had quoted so disastrously that day at the creek-bank:

"Close all the roads of all the world, *Love's* road is open still!"

As she looked up to speak he interrupted her hurriedly:

"Yes, I know how miserable I made you that day with my outburst against fate, and I've felt that you've never believed me since when I laughed and joked and said that I enjoyed things. But that was only one time that I gave way, just once that I got down in the dumps and I don't want you to think that is my usual state of feelings. Really I'm getting more out of life than you imagine. I'm putting up the best fight I can. I just wanted you to know that although every other road in the world is closed against me I can still scrape along pretty comfortably because that last line is true. Love's road *is* open still. You all have made it a good wide one for me, and made it worth while for me to travel it with you cheerfully to the end. I'm perfectly willing to, *now*."

"Oh, Jack!" cried Mary in a voice that trembled with both joy and tears. "I've had a happy Christmas, but knowing you feel that way is the very best part of all!"

CHAPTER VIII

"DIE KLEINEN TEUFEL"

CHRISTMAS was followed by a week of small calamities. Some of them would have been laughable, counted singly, but taken all together they assumed a seriousness not to be considered lightly.

In the first place, Mary, attempting to tie the boat at the usual landing, slipped on the muddy bank and dropped the chain. In her effort to recover it she stepped into the water. Her shoes were soaking wet when she reached home, and as they were her only good ones she stuffed them carefully with paper and hung them over the little drum stove in the living room to dry. That evening Jack read aloud while they washed the dishes, so they were all in the kitchen when the smouldering log in the drum stove, having reached the blazing point, suddenly burst into flame.

Presently a smell of burning leather made them all begin to sniff inquiringly, and Mary rushed in to find that one of her shoes had dropped from the

string to which she had tied it by the laces, and was scorching to a crisp on the red-hot stove. Her old shoes were so shabby that the immediate need of new ones, left her figuring over the family accounts until bed-time. It was hard to cut down a list of expenses already reduced to low water mark.

The next day a wet "Norther" blew up, bringing the first cold weather of the winter. After weeks of almost summer-like heat, the mercury dropped to freezing point in just a few hours, and roaring fires in both the kitchen and drum stoves failed to warm the little cottage. Like most houses in that section it had not been built with a view to excluding the cold. The wind blew in under the north door, lifting the rugs until they shifted with a wave-like motion across the floor. Jack had to have a blanket hung behind his chair, and when Mrs. Ware sat down to write her weekly letter to Joyce the draughts that rattled the windows set her to sneezing as if she never could stop.

Mary, full of resources, brought her pink sunbonnet and perched it on her mother's head, pulling its ruffled cape well down on her shoulders.

"There!" she exclaimed, laughing at the jaunty effect. "That will keep 'the cauld blasts' from

giving you a stiff neck. Do look in the mirror and then draw a picture of yourself for Joyce. Tell her that the Sunny South is a delusion. The mercury is only down to freezing, but I am sure that there isn't an Esquimau in all the Arctic Circle as cold as we are this blessed minute. That wind goes through a body like a fine-pointed needle."

"These little stoves fairly eat up the wood," she grumbled a few minutes later, glancing into the empty wood-box which Norman had piled to the top before he left that morning.

"Norman will be back soon," said Mrs. Ware, looking out from her aureole of pink ruffles, which she had found such a comfortable shield from the draughts that she left it as Mary had placed it. "He'll fill the box again as soon as he comes."

But Mary had slipped into a coat and was tying a veil over her ears. "It isn't safe to wait," she answered. "We'd be stiff and stark as icicles in no time if we were to let the fires go out. I don't mind being stoker. It's good exercise."

She skipped out to the wood-pile gaily enough, but the tune she was whistling changed to a long-drawn note of surprise and dismay when she saw what inroads they had made on it since the last time she had noticed it.

"We'll have to have another cord right away," she thought. "I never dreamed that fuel would be such a big item of expense, away down here so far South. But if we have much more weather like this it will be a very serious item."

The discovery sent her back to her account book again, but this time she took it to her own room where Jack could not see her figuring. The butcher raised the price of meat that week. Both butter and eggs went higher, and Jack's rubber air-cushion sprung such a leak that it collapsed hopelessly. A new one was a necessity. Then the cold Norther made Jack's rheumatism so much worse that he had to stay in bed, and several visits from the doctor and a druggist's bill had to be added to the list of the week's calamities.

The last straw was reached when Joyce's letter came, deploring the fact that the check which she was enclosing was only half the size which she usually sent. She had some unexpected expenses at the studio which she was obliged to meet, but she hoped to send the customary amount next month. This information was not in the letter which Mrs. Ware promptly sent in to Jack by Norman, but in a separate postscript, folded inside the check. Mary read it with startled eyes.

"Whatever are we going to do?" she asked in a despairing whisper.

Mrs. Ware shook her head and sat folding and unfolding the check in an absent-minded way for several minutes. Then she went into her room for pen and ink to endorse it, so that Mary, who was going down into the town that afternoon, could cash it. She was gone a long time and when she came back she had two letters ready to post.

As Mary went down the road a while later, she glanced at the first envelope which was addressed to Joyce, admiring as she always did her mother's penmanship.

"It's just like her," she thought, "so fine and even and ladylike." Then she gave an exclamation of surprise as she saw that the second envelope was addressed to Mrs. Barnaby.

"Whatever can she be writing to *her* about?" she wondered. "It's queer she never said anything about it, when we always talk over everything together, even the tiniest trifles."

She puzzled over it nearly all the way to the post-office till she remembered that she had heard her mother say that she was not altogether satisfied with the new doctor's treatment for Jack, and that she wanted to ask Mrs. Barnaby whom to call in

consultation. Satisfied with that solution, Mary thought no more about the matter till the following Friday, when she came back from a short call at the rectory, to find that Mrs. Barnaby had just driven away from the house. She was disappointed, for these visits were always hailed as joyful events by the entire household.

"I wouldn't have missed her for *anything!*" exclaimed Mary, following her mother into their bedroom. "She's so diverting. What particularly funny things did she say this time? *What's that?*"

Her glance and question indicated a bundle that her mother had brought in from the back doorstep and laid on the bed. Mrs. Ware shook her head meaningly, and closed the door into Jack's room before she answered. Then she said in a low tone:

"It's some linen and lace that Mrs. Barnaby brought this afternoon. I wrote to her asking her if she had any fine hand-sewing that I could do. Sh!" she whispered, lifting a warning finger, as Mary's cry of "Why, Mamma Ware!" interrupted her.

"Jack will hear you, and he is not to know. That's why I had Pedro take the bundle to the back door. Mrs. Barnaby understands. Something had

to be done, and under the circumstances sewing is the only thing I can turn my hand to at home."

"But mamma!" exclaimed Mary, so distressed that she was almost crying. "Your eyes are not strong enough for that any more. You nearly wore yourself out trying to support us when we were little, and I'm very sure we're not going to allow it now. Joyce would be terribly distressed, and as for Jack — I know perfectly well that he'd just rather lie down and die than have you do it. We'll bundle that stuff right back to Mrs. Barnaby, and I'll go down town and see if I can't get a position in one of the stores."

Mrs. Ware's answer was in such a low voice that it went no farther than the closed door, but it silenced Mary's protests. Only a few times in her remembrance had the gentle little woman used that tone of authority with her children, but on those rare occasions they recognized the force of her determination and the uselessness of opposing it. Mary turned away distressed and sore over the situation. She said nothing more, but as she went about her work she kept wiping away the tears, and a fierce rebellion raged inwardly.

There would have been little said at the supper-table that night if Norman had not come home in

a talkative mood. He was to start to the public High School the following Monday, at the beginning of the new term, and had recently made the acquaintance of a boy lately come to Bauer, who would enter with him.

"Ed Masters is his name," Norman reported, raising his voice a trifle, so that Jack, who was taking his supper at the same time from a bedside table in the next room, might be included in the conversation.

"I like him first rate, and it will make it lots easier for me at school, not to be the only new boy. The only trouble is, he doesn't know whether his folks are going to stay in Bauer long enough to make it worth while for him to start or not. They came for the whole winter, but they say that they can't stand it at the hotel many more days if something isn't done to those Mallory kids. Ed says they're regular little imps for mischief. They've been here only two weeks, but they're known all over Bauer as 'die kleinen teufel.'"

"Which being interpreted," laughed Jack from the next room, "means the little devils. What have they done to earn such a name?"

"It might be easier to tell what they haven't done," answered Norman. "There's two of them,

the boy seven and the girl eight, but they're exactly the same size, and look so much alike everybody takes them for twins. They put a puppy in the ice-cream freezer yesterday morning, Ed says, and Miss Edna, the landlady's daughter, almost had a spasm when she went to make ice-cream for dinner and found it in the can.

"Yesterday afternoon the delivery wagon stopped at the side entrance of the hotel (it's the Williams House where Ed is staying), and those children waited until the boy had gone in with a basket of groceries. Then they climbed up into the delivery wagon and changed the things all around in the other baskets so that the orders were hopelessly mixed up, and nobody got what he had bought. There was a ten gallon can of kerosene in the wagon, the kind that has a pump attachment. The boy stopped to talk a minute to Mrs. Williams, and by the time he got back they had pumped all the kerosene out into the road, and were making regular gatling guns of themselves with a bushel of potatoes. They were firing them out of the basket as fast as they could throw, in a wild race to see which would be first to grab the last potato.

"Ed says they ride up and down the hotel galleries on their tricycles till it sounds like thunder,

when the other boarders are trying to take a nap, or they'll chase up and down hooting and slashing the air with switches. If people don't dodge and scrooge back against the wall they'll get slashed too.

"I suppose every merchant on Main Street has some grievance against them, for they haven't the slightest regard for other people's rights or property, and they're not afraid of anything. The little girl went into the livery stable the other day and swung onto the tail of one of those big white 'bus horses, and pulled a handful of hairs out of it. It's a favorite trick of theirs to climb into any automobile left at the curbstone, and honk the horn till the owner comes out. Then they calmly sit still and demand a ride."

"They must be the children that Doctor Mackay was telling me about," spoke up Jack. "He came in here one day, furious with them. He had caught them smearing soap over the glass wind shield of his new machine. They had climbed all over the cushions with their muddy feet, and tinkered with the clock till it couldn't run. He threatened to tell their father, and all they did was to put their thumbs to their noses and say: 'Yah! Tattle-tale! You *can't* tell! He's a thousand miles away!'"

"Isn't any one responsible for them?" asked Mrs. Ware.

"Yes," said Norman, "there is a colored girl at their heels whenever they don't give her the slip. But their mother is ill — came here for her health, Ed says, and their grandmother who tries to look after them is so deaf that she can't hear their noise and their saucy speeches. They're so quick that she never sees them making faces and sticking their tongues out at people. They do it behind her back. She thinks they are little angels, but she'll find out when they're asked to leave the Hotel. Ed says it's coming to that very soon — either the Mallorys will have to go, or everybody else will. They got into his box of fishing tackle, and you never saw such a mess as they made. He is furious."

With her mind intent on her own troubles, Mary did not listen to the recital of other people's with her usual interest, although what she heard that night was recalled very clearly afterward. All evening she brooded over her grievance, trying to discover some remedy. She could not take the sewing away from her mother and do it herself, for while fairly skilful with her needle, she had not learned to make a fine art of her handiwork. The garments

Mrs. Ware made were as beautifully wrought as those fashioned and embroidered by the French nuns.

"I *know* Mrs. Barnaby never would order anything so fine and expensive," thought Mary bitterly, "if she didn't know that we need the money so badly. She did it because mamma asked her, and felt that she couldn't refuse. That is a sort of charity that kills me to accept, and I sha'n't do it one minute longer than I have to."

It was easier to make such a resolution, however, than to carry it out. A short call on Mrs. Metz next morning, showed her that her first plan was not feasible. The old woman being related to nearly half of Bauer by birth or marriage, and knowing the other half with the intimacy of an "oldest inhabitant," was in a position to know each merchant's needs and requirements, also what wages he paid each employee. Most of them had no occasion to hire outside help. Their own families furnished enough. It was a necessary requirement of course, that any one applying for a position must speak German. That one thing alone barred Mary out, and she went home anxious and disheartened. Still, even if she could have spoken a dozen tongues, the position she had coveted did not seem so desirable,

after she learned the small amount the clerks received.

All that day and the next she worried over the matter, and finally decided to go to Mrs. Rochester and ask her advice. On the way up to the rectory she stopped at the post-office. The mail was being distributed, and while she stood waiting for the delivery window to open, the rector himself came in. As he turned away from his locked box, in which only papers had been deposited so far, he saw Mary and went over to her with a cordial greeting.

"I'm looking for something," he said with a twinkle of fun in his eyes. "Maybe you can help me. It is as hard to find as the proverbial needle in the haystack, but I must have it before sundown if possible. Some one as patient as Job, as tactful as a diplomat, with the nerve of a lion-tamer and the resources of a sleight-of-hand performer — the kind who can draw rabbits out of a silk hat if necessary."

Mary laughed. "What are you going to do with such a wonderful creature when you find it?"

"Turn it loose on those Mallory children," answered Mr. Rochester, lowering his tone. "I was sent for yesterday, presumably to see their mother

who is an invalid, but I found that the real reason was to give some advice to Mr. Mallory about the children. The hotel refused to harbor them any longer, and he had been summoned hastily by telegraph. He has moved his family to a furnished cottage near the hotel. Their meals will be sent in to them, and his mother can look after his wife, but he is desperate about the children.

"He acknowledges he could not cope with them even if he could stay here all the time away from his business. His wife has never allowed them to be punished, and has foolishly humored them till they are past being controlled. He besought me to find some one who could take them in hand for a part of the day at least."

"But what could an outsider do with them if their own family has failed?" queried Mary.

"Ah, that's where the lion-tamer and the sleight-of-hand performer combination gets in his work. He must quell them with his eye, and draw ways and means out of his silk hat. Mrs. Mallory would like to have them taught to read and write if it can be done without crossing the little dears, but I inferred that their father would be glad simply to have them taken in hand and tamed sufficiently to keep them from being public nuisances."

Mary's pulses began to pound with the excitement of a daring thought, but she managed to appear unconcerned, and asked him in a joking way, "And if you can't find this Job-like, diplomatic lion-tamer they want, they'll have to take some ordinary person?"

"They'll be obliged to. But I'm afraid that a quest even in that direction will prove fruitless. It's a field for real missionary effort, though. Some one might be willing to approach it in that spirit."

The delivery window flew up, and as the waiting line began moving along towards it, Mr. Rochester lifted his hat and turned away. But before he could fit his key in the lock of his box, Mary was at his side.

"One moment, please," she exclaimed, her face flushing. She spoke very fast. "If you think that *I* can fill that position will you tell them about me? I've really got lots of patience with children, and"— laughing nervously — "last summer I partly tamed a young wild-cat. I could at least tell the children stories, and teach them all sorts of wood-lore that would keep them busy and interested out of doors. Besides," she flushed still deeper, "I *must* find some way to earn some money soon. My very need of

it would make me try all the harder to fill the place. I am on my way now to see Mrs. Rochester and ask her advice about what to do."

A few minutes later she and Mr. Rochester were walking rapidly along the road in the direction of the Williams House. As they crossed the wide foot-bridge which spans the creek, and climbed the hill on the other side, she told him of the work she had done the previous summer under the noted naturalist, Professor Carnes.

"He had arranged to send his fifteen-year-old niece to Lone Rock this winter," she added, "but her physicians decided at the last moment that she needed a milder climate. She was to have boarded near us, and I had promised to devote my mornings to keeping her out of doors and teaching her in an indirect way that would not suggest books or study hours. Maybe the fact that such a man as Professor Carnes thought me competent to do that, and was willing to pay me a grown teacher's salary, might have some weight with the Mallorys. Oh, I *hope* they won't think seventeen and a half is too young," she exclaimed, with an anxious glance at her companion, as if to discover his opinion.

"If I'd only known such an important interview was ahead of me I'd have worn my blue suit. I

look lots older in that because it's longer than this one."

"I don't think you need worry about that," the rector answered. He spoke gravely, but the face he turned away from her twitched with suppressed amusement.

They passed the Williams House, and turned in at the gate of a gray cottage, where Mr. Mallory himself met them at the door. He was a prosperous young broker with an affable manner and the self-confident air that some people acquire from the carrying of a fat bank-book. He ushered them into the room where Mrs. Mallory was lying on a couch. She was very young and blue-eyed and soft-haired. Curled up among the cushions under a blue and white afghan, she made Mary think of a kitten. She seemed so helpless and incapable, as if she had never known anything but cushions and cream, all her life.

Two children were playing quietly under a table, in the corner. Mary could not see what they were doing, for they were lying on their stomachs with their heads towards the wall. Only their little black-stockinged legs and slippered feet protruded from under the table, and they were waving back and forth in mid-air above their backs.

When Mr. Rochester introduced Mary as the young lady they were so desirous of finding, one pair of small legs stopped waving, and their owner backed hastily out into the room. Humping along on all fours until she reached her mother's couch, she sat on the floor beside it and began studying the visitors with a quiet intense gaze. She was an attractive child, with rather a wistful little face. Her hair was cut short in Buster Brown fashion, and she was remarkably strong and sturdy looking for a girl. Otherwise there was nothing in her appearance to justify one's belief that she had done all the tom-boy things ascribed to her.

To Mary's surprise Mrs. Mallory discussed the children as freely as if they were not present, repeating their pranks and smart sayings as if they were too young to understand what was being said, and frankly admitting her inability to control them.

"Mr. Mallory and I agree on every subject but the proper way to rear children, and we almost come to blows over that," she said, smiling up at him till the dimples in her cheeks made her seem more childish and appealing than ever.

"I believe in letting children do exactly as they please as far as possible. The time will come soon enough when they can't, poor little dears. We have

not imposed our wishes on them even in the matter of names. It has been a life-long regret with me that my mother burdened me with a name that I despised, and I made up my mind that *my* children should be allowed to choose their own. Little brother, there, has chosen his father's name, Herbert. But we're slow about adopting it. We've called him Brud so long, his sister's baby name for him, when she was learning to talk, that it is hard to break the habit."

"And the little girl?" asked Mary politely, beginning to feel that she had hastened to shoulder a load which she might not be able to carry.

"Really it's too cunning the way Little Sister does," exclaimed Mrs. Mallory. "One week she announces she's Genevive and the next that's she's Bessie or Maud or Irma — whatever happens to strike her fancy, and she gets simply furious if we don't remember every time she changes. That was one thing that Miss Edna fell out with us about. She kept calling her Bessie the week that she wished to be known as Marion. Of course the child naturally resented it, and Miss Edna actually caught her and shook her, when she hadn't done a thing but throw a biscuit or some little article like that in her direction."

Mary cast a half-frightened glance at Mr. Rochester, aghast at the prospect before her. The soft voice went on.

"*We* don't believe in being harsh with children, *do* we, Beautiful?" She reached down to stroke the little head nestled against her couch. "I want my children to have it to remember of their mother that she never scolded or punished them. *You* can say that. *Can't* you, pet?"

Pet only nodded in reply, but she caught the slim white hand in both her own and pressed it lovingly against her cheek. It made a pretty tableau, and Mary found it hard to realize that this affectionate little creature was one of the "kleinen teufel" of Norman's report. But she noticed the satisfied gleam in the child's eyes when her mother went on to retail other instances of Miss Edna's harshness.

Mr. Rochester saw the expression also, and the shrewd, knowing glance that followed when he finally broached the terms of a settlement, asking them to specify exactly what would be expected of Mary and what salary would be paid in return. He mildly suggested that it might be wiser to dispense with a juvenile audience at this point.

He had chosen words that he thought far beyond

Little Sister's comprehension, and there was something startling as well as uncanny in the way she spoke up for the first time since his entrance.

"I aren't a-going to leave this room! Nobody can make me!" .

Mrs. Mallory looked up at her husband with an amused simper and shook her head as if to say, "Now, isn't that the smartest thing you *ever* saw?" and Mr. Rochester's suggestion was ignored.

When they rose to go it had been arranged that Mary was to take the children in charge every afternoon, except Sundays, from one o'clock till five, at the same salary Professor Carnes had offered her. She was to teach them anything she could in any way she chose, provided her methods did not conflict with their happiness. The chief thing was that they should be kept interested and amused.

"Then tomorrow at one," said Mr. Mallory, rising with them, "they will take their first lesson. Come out from under that table, Brud, and get acquainted with your new teacher."

Brud waved one leg in token that he heard, but made no further response. Suddenly Sister found her voice again.

"What you going to teach us first? 'Cause if we don't like it we won't go."

Taken thus suddenly, without having had a moment in which to form any plan of action, Mary groped wildly around in her mind for an answer. She recognized this as a crucial moment. She could not hesitate long, for Mrs. Mallory's appealing blue eyes were fixed on her also, the while she patted the child's cheek and purred, "Why, of *course* little Sister will go when the nice lady is planning to give her such a happy time."

"Happy time adoing *what?*" was the persistent question.

Just then, Meliss, the colored nurse-girl, opened the side door, and there floated in from the hotel kitchen the appetizing smell of pies — hot mince pies just being lifted from the oven. Mary caught eagerly at the straw of suggestion which the odor offered. At the same time some instinct prompted her that it was foolishness to address this child of eight as if she were an infant, or to talk down to her as her family made a practise of doing. So speaking directly to her as if she were addressing an intelligent and reasonable being she said gravely:

"The kind of school we are going to have is so different from any you've ever heard of, that I can't explain it beforehand. I can only tell you this, — it

is somewhat like a Jack Horner pie. Each day you'll put in your thumb and pull out a plum. But what that particular plum will be depends on so many things that I could not possibly give it a name before it actually happens. It will be a surprise school."

At the mention of pies the legs under the table hastily came down out of the air, and the small boy attached hastily backed out into general view. Planting himself in front of Mary with a swaggering air, his feet wide apart, he announced aggressively.

"I'll bring my new hatchet if I want to, and nobody can make me leave it at home!"

There was something so impertinent in his manner that Mary longed to shake him and say, "Don't be so sure of that, Mr. Smarty!" But remembering the dignified position she now had to maintain, she only remarked in a matter of fact tone:

"If your hatchet has a good sharp edge it will probably be one of the first things you'll need. And you'll find use for a pocket full of medium sized nails, too."

"What for?" he demanded, drawing a little closer to begin a thorough cross examination. But

Mary, who had turned to listen to a question of Mr. Mallory's, paid no heed.

"I say," Brud repeated, calling as if she were deaf. "What for? *What for?* WHAT FOR?"

Mary paid not the slightest attention until she had answered his father, then said deliberately, "I've already explained that in a surprise school you can't know what is going to happen till the time comes."

"Why?" he whined.

"Because," she said, pausing impressively, and then lowering her voice as if she were imparting a mysterious secret, "*it's the Law of the Jungle.*"

The unexpectedness of this mystifying answer and the sepulchral voice in which she gave it, was so different from anything Brud had ever encountered before, that it took him some seconds to recover, and she was gone before he could think of another question.

Mr. Mallory walked to the gate with them. "You've certainly started out well, Miss Ware," he remarked admiringly. "At first I thought we might have some difficulty in getting their consent to go, but they'll be on hand to-morrow all right. You've aroused their curiosity to such a pitch that

a regiment armed to the teeth couldn't keep them from satisfying it now." After an instant's pause he added a trifle awkwardly, seeming to feel some explanation was due, "Their mother never sees a fault in them, and my business keeps me away from them so much that — well, you see yourself how it is."

On the way home neither Mary nor Mr. Rochester spoke till they were halfway down the hill. Then they looked at each other and laughed.

"I hope I haven't got you into *too* deep water, Miss Mary," he said. "It's a big undertaking. I must confess to a curiosity as great as Brud's. What *are* you going to do with them?"

"Oh, I don't know!" exclaimed Mary desperately. "Did you see me fencing for time when Little Sister demanded to be told what I'd teach them first? Things had happened so fast that I hadn't had a moment to think, so I had to say the first thing that came into my head. I tremble to think what a long pause there might have been if the smell of those pies had not suggested an answer. I think the first week I'll just play with them as hard as I can. Play Indian maybe, so that if they get too obstreperous it will be part of the game to tie them to a tree and torture them. But after all I

can't help being sorry for the little things after hearing their mother talk to them and about them."

At the end of the foot-bridge where she turned to take the lower road which was the short cut home, she started to thank him, but he stopped her earnest words with an uplifted hand and an amused protest.

"Wait and see how it turns out before you thank me. You may want to wreak dire vengeance on me before the week's over, for getting you into such a predicament."

With a cordial word of parting Mary hurried down the road, and burst into the house with the breathless announcement that she'd consented to go as a missionary; that Mr. Rochester had persuaded her to take the step. She waited a moment to give them a chance to guess what special field it was she was about to enter, but was so eager to tell that she had to burst out with the answer herself:

"It's to the heathen at home I am going, I'm to be an apostle to 'die kleinen teufel'!"

Jack gave a loud whistle of surprise and then burst out laughing, but Mrs. Ware looked across at him soberly, with a triumphant nod of the head.

"There! What did I tell you?" she asked.

"Didn't I say that she'd soon adjust herself — find something to amuse herself and all the rest of us as well?"

Mary, who had been wondering all the way home how her news would be received, had never imagined this — that her venture would be looked upon merely as an outlet for her surplus energy, but after one gasp of surprise she was glad that her mother had put it that way.

"She did it on purpose," Mary thought. "So that Jack need not have added to his other ills the tormenting thought that he had driven his little sister to a disagreeable task, in order that she might help support him."

An understanding glance from her mother, full of approval and tender appreciation, flashed on her as she drew her chair up to the stove, but all she said was, "I'm sure you had an amusing interview." Then Mary proceeded to recount it, giving a graphic and laughable description of her half hour in the gray cottage. But all the time she was talking and mimicking she was looking forward to the moment when she could escape to a corner of the kitchen, and calculate with pencil and paper what she could never do in her head, the height of prosperity to which this tidal wave of a salary would lift them.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE BARNABY RANCH

THREE alert and expectant little figures sat in a row on the steps of the gray cottage, and watched for Mary's coming the next afternoon. Brud, sawing his hatchet blade up and down on the edge of the step below him, made deep notches in the paint while he waited. Little Sister, fuming with impatience, sat with one arm around the young hunting dog which squatted beside her, and made dire threats as to her conduct, in case the new teacher should refuse to let him go with them.

He was a brown English pointer, with a white vest, and the silver plate on his collar bore the name by which he was registered among the aristocracy of dogs. The name was "Uncle August." Strangers always laughed when they read that on his collar, but as Brud usually began to explain about that time that he was a "peggydreed" dog, his sister thought that they were laughing at the way he pronounced pedigreed. Therefore, she would gravely correct him and add the information

"MARY WARE in TEXAS"

"Three alert and expectant little figures sat in a row on the steps"

that one of his great gram'pas was the King of Kent and another was Rip-rap; that he was the finest bird-dog in the United States, — her pappy said so, — and that he had been to a dog college and learned all that there was for a dog *to* know.

The moment Mary appeared, the usual formula was gone through with before they gave her a chance for more than a bare word of greeting, and she never knew how much her reception of Uncle August counted in her favor with the two watching children.

Like everybody else, she laughed when she heard his name, and put out her hand to shake the brown paw which he gravely offered. But when he continued to hold it out to her, and plainly showed by every way in a dog's power that he liked her and wanted to emphasize his friendliness, she took his silky ears in her hands, and looking down into his wistful eyes, praised and petted him till he wriggled all over for joy.

Brud immediately gave her his full approval, but Little Sister, while impressed favorably, was not in a mood to approve anything fully. According to Meliss, "she'd done got out of bed crosswise of herself that mawnin'" and had continued so ever since. There was a pout on her lips when

her mother called her in to kiss her good-bye, and there was a defiant light in her eyes as she listened to the farewell instructions delivered to Mary through the window. She lagged behind when the others started briskly off, and halfway down the hill began to drag and scrape her feet annoyingly through the gravel. Although she hadn't the faintest intention of turning back, she stood still when they reached the foot-bridge, and announced with a whine:

"I'm going home! I aren't a having a happy time like mommey said I would!"

Mary, who was a few steps ahead, never stopped, even to glance back over her shoulder, and Sister was obliged to follow in order to hear what she was saying.

"You can hardly expect to enjoy a thing before it *begins,*" explained Mary, politely, in that grown-up tone that was such a novelty to Sister when employed towards herself. "You've never seen the place where Mr. Metz has given us permission to build. It's where a branch of the creek curves up through his place. It's dry now, but it is full of big, flat rocks where we can build the fire when we get to that part of the school. Maybe we'll be ready for one as soon as next week."

There was no response save a stifled sniffle and the patter of small feet which had to move briskly in order to keep up with the procession. But Brud's questions opened the way for further information which was not lost on the reluctant follower.

"There's a little spring that comes bubbling out below, so that we won't have to go far to fill our kettle. He said we might trim off some of the smallest shoots of his willows, and he marked the trees we could chop. That's where you will find use for your hatchet. Willow switches woven together make a fine covering for a wigwam or a Robinson Crusoe shack. I learned how to weave them the way the Indians do when I first went to Arizona."

It was the novelty of being talked to in that dignified, grown-up way that drew Sister slowly but surely along after the others. As they followed the creek, Uncle August, dashing on ahead, scared a rabbit out of the underbrush. He was too well trained to give chase to it, so the frightened little cotton-tail loped away unhurt. It served its mission in life, however, as far as Mary was concerned, for it reminded her of a story which she proceeded to tell as they walked along. Sister listened, sus-

piciously, expecting a personal application at the end, about a sulky little girl who never wanted to do anything that other people did. That was the kind Meliss always told. So did mommey, in vivacious, kindergarten style, when they had been especially naughty. Sister hated stories, since those with a moral attached were the only kind she had ever known.

When this tale turned out to be one of Br'er Rabbit's funny adventures in outwitting Mr. Fox, and ended with a laugh instead of a personal application, she was bewildered for a moment. Then she remembered that this was a surprise school, and determined not to miss anything that seemed to start out with such promise for further entertainment, she stopped dragging her feet and took up a more cheerful pace along the creek bank, in the trail of Brud and Uncle August.

It would have been a determined soul indeed who could have stayed morose very long, out-of-doors in the perfect weather that had followed the Norther. It was like late October in Kentucky — sunny, yet with a crystal-like coolness that made exercise a delight.

It had been such a short time since Mary had stepped out of her own play days that she found

herself stepping into the children's with an *abandon* which almost equalled theirs. There was no pretense about her enjoyment at first. With a pleasure almost as deep and unalloyed as when she and Hazel Lee built wigwams on the edge of the Arizona desert, she went about the building of a shack on the side of this Texas creek bank.

The energy with which she brought things to pass was contagious. Brud and Little Sister worked like beavers to keep up with this rare, new playfellow, who had something better than a Midas touch, — something which not only put a golden glamour over everything she said and did, but turned their little world of mimic sports into a real world of tremendous meaning and importance. For the first time in his life Brud found himself where there were things lawful for his hatchet to cut. For the first time Sister was kept so busy doing delightful things that there was no necessity for anyone to say "don't."

Before the week was over Mary had opened so many windows for them into the Land of Make-believe that they began to look upon her resources for entertainment as boundless. The more she gave, the more they demanded. They never wanted to go home and would have hung on to her

until dark every evening, had it not been for the alarm-clock which she brought with her each day. She had no watch and was afraid to accept Jack's offer of his, lest she should lose it in the woods. It was a little, round clock, with a bell on top, the dollar and a half kind sold in country groceries and cross-roads stores.

She always wound the alarm just before she hung the clock on a bush, muttering over it a mysterious charm that the children listened to with skeptical grins, yet with furtive side-glances at each other. To her surprise they accepted the whirr and bang of the alarm-bell at five o'clock as the voice of Fate, which must be promptly obeyed. She often wondered why they did. To Mary the muttering of the abracadabra charm was only a part of the game, one of the many little embellishments which made her plays more picturesque than ordinary people's, and she had no thought of the children attaching any superstitious import to it. She did not take into account their long association with Meliss, who was wise on the subject of hoodoos. But the fact remained that her alarm-clock was the only timepiece within their reach which they never tampered with, and the only one whose summons they ever obeyed.

It was probably because she had set such a hard pace for herself that first week that she found it so difficult to go on afterward. A surprise school was a greater tax on her inventive genius than she had anticipated. She had promised them a different plum in their pie each day, and she lay awake at night to plan games that were instructive as well as interesting, for she was conscientiously carrying out her agreement to teach them as well as to amuse them. By the end of the second week the strain was almost unendurable.

One evening she went home to find the Barnaby carriage and the gray mules standing at the gate. Mrs. Barnaby had brought in some venison for them, and waited to see Mary before taking her leave.

"I'm waiting to hear about those little savages of yours," she said, as Mary greeted her and sank limply down into a chair. "Why, you look all tuckered out. They must be even worse than people say."

"No, they're not!" protested Mary, warmly. "I'm really proud of the way I succeeded. The only thing is, I have to keep them busy and interested every moment, and they're so hungry for stories they never get enough. The poor little souls

have never heard any before, and it is really pathetic the way they listen. They'll sit as still as graven images, so interested they scarcely breathe, till the last word is out. Then they'll begin, 'Oh, tell us another, Miss Mayry! Just *one* more! Please, Miss Mayry!' They cling to me like burrs. We nearly always have a small campfire every day now, for either we're Indians or gypsies, cooking our meals, or we're witches brewing spells, or elves gathering magic fires for our midnight revels. They play so hard that the last hour they always want to sit down by the embers and listen to stories. But they've nearly drained me dry now. Sometimes I come home so limp and exhausted I can scarcely move my tongue. I'm glad that to-morrow is Sunday, for I've surely earned one day of rest."

"Come out and spend it at the ranch," urged Mrs. Barnaby, hospitably. "It happens that there is no service to-morrow at St. Boniface, but James will be coming in for the mail, and will be glad to bring you out in time for dinner."

Mary had spent two afternoons at the Barnaby ranch, driving out with Mrs. Rochester, and she enjoyed them so much that she welcomed the thought of a return to the homelike old place, with its air of thrift and comfort. Jack had been better

the last few days, so she eagerly accepted the invitation.

Next morning Mr. Barnaby drove in for her himself with the gray mules and the roomy old carriage. Mary, comfortably stowed away on the back seat, because it had the best springs, leaned forward to hold the reins while he went into the post-office. She had risen early and hurried through as much of the work as she could in order that her holiday might not mean extra work for her mother. Now with an easy conscience she settled herself to enjoy a care-free day, and looked forward with keen enjoyment to the seven miles' drive along the smooth country road.

She had been sitting in a pleasant reverie some four or five minutes, when a familiar little voice close by the wheel piped out:

"Why, there's Miss Mayry! *Where* are you going?"

Before she could reply, Brud and Sister and Uncle August came swarming into the carriage, stepping on her toes, climbing up on the seat, and showing such joy over having discovered her that it was impossible not to give them a gracious reception, even though she groaned inwardly at the sight of them. Their prompt demand for a story the

moment they were seated was followed by the appearance of Mr. Barnaby.

"I can't tell you any stories to-day," Mary explained, pleasantly, "because I am going visiting. But I'll tell you a lovely one to-morrow, about Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. You'll have to hop out now. Mr. Barnaby is ready to start."

"I aren't going to hop out!" declared Sister, winding her arms around Mary's neck in a choking clasp. Brud immediately threw his arms around Uncle August and held him tight, regardless of the fact that Mr. Barnaby was whistling to the dog and motioning him to jump out.

"We are agoing with you," Brud announced.

"But you are not invited," Mary answered, in a provoked tone. "You surely don't care to go where you're neither asked nor wanted!"

"Come on, Bub, I'm in a hurry," said Mr. Barnaby, kindly. He took hold of the child's arms to lift him out, but Brud, seizing the back of the seat with both hands, stiffened himself and began to cry, shrieking out between sobs, "I want to go with Miss Mayry! *Please* don't put me out! Aw, Miss Mayry! *Don't* let him put me out!"

Immediately Sister added her tearful wails to

his. Meliss, sauntering down the street in search of the children, heard the familiar cries, and quickened her pace to a run. A crowd was gathering around the carriage. She came up in time to hear Mr. Barnaby say, good-naturedly, "Oh, well, if they're going to break their little hearts over it, let 'em come along. *I* don't mind!"

"But their mother will think that something has happened to them," protested Mary. "She'll be frantic."

Meliss pushed her way through the crowd to the carriage. "No 'm, she won't, Miss Ma'y. She won't worry none. Her haid aches fit to bus' this mawnin'. I'll tell her *you's* takin' keer of 'em, and she'll be only too thankful to you-all for a free day."

"It's Meliss who will be thankful for a free day," thought Mary, still hesitating. She rebelled at the thought of her own day being spoiled, and realized that for discipline's sake the children ought not to be allowed to carry their point. Mr. Barnaby settled the question by stepping into the carriage and gathering up the reins.

"Tell their mother I'll bring them back before night," he said to Meliss.

The sobs and tears stopped as suddenly as they

had begun. Presently Mr. Barnaby glanced back over his shoulder, saying:

"This load doesn't seem equally divided. Here, one of you kids climb over into the front seat with me." At the invitation both children threw themselves violently on Mary and clung to her, beginning to sniffle again. He looked back at her with the humorous one-sided smile that she always found irresistibly droll.

"First time I ever came across that particular brand of youngsters. Strikes me the old Nick has put his ear marks on 'em pretty plain. You're crowded back there, aren't you, with that dog sitting on your feet? Here, sir! Come over here with me!"

With one bound Uncle August sprang over on the front seat, and sat up beside his host, looking so dignified and so humanly interested in everything they passed that Mr. Barnaby laughed. He laid a caressing hand on him, saying, "So you're the dog that's been to college. Well, it has made a gentleman of you, sir! I admire your manners. It's a pity you can't pass them around the family."

Charmed by the novelty of the drive, the children cuddled up against Mary, and were so quiet all the way to the ranch that she felt remorseful

when she remembered how near she had come to depriving them of the pleasure.

Mrs. Barnaby threw up her hands in surprise when she saw the three self-invited guests who calmly followed Mary out of the carriage, but when the situation had been explained in a laughing aside, she said in her whole-souled, motherly way, "Now, my dear, don't you worry one mite! We are used to children, and we'll find some way to keep them from spoiling your day."

Her first step in that direction was to take them out to the kitchen and fill their hands with cookies, and send them outdoors to eat them. She also gave them instructions to stay out and play. A low swing and a seesaw between the kitchen and the garden gate showed where her grand-children amused themselves hours at a time on their annual visits. When she went back into the living-room Mary had seated herself in a rocking-chair with a sigh of content.

"What a dear old room this is," she said, looking up with a smile. "It makes me think of Grandmother Ware's. I love its low ceiling and little, deep-set windows and wide fireplace. I could sit here all day and do nothing but listen to the clock tick and the fire crackle, and rest."

"Well, you do just that," insisted Mrs. Barnaby, hospitably. "I have to be out in the kitchen for a while. I've got pretty fair help, but she needs a good deal of oversight, so you sit here and enjoy the quiet while you can."

The early rising and the drive had made Mary drowsy, and as soon as she was left alone the deep stillness of the country Sabbath that filled the room seemed to fold about her like a mantle of restfulness. She closed her eyes, making believe that she really was back at her Grandmother Ware's; that the sunshine streaming in at the open door was the sunshine of a Northern June instead of a Texas January; and that the odor of lemon verbena which reached her now and then came from an outside garden instead of the potted plant on the deep window-sill at her elbow. The old place was so associated in Mary's memory with a feeling of perpetual, unbroken calm, that she had never lost one of her earliest impressions that it was the place of "green pastures and still waters" mentioned in the Psalms.

"Jack always said that I'll have my innings when I'm a grandmother," she said, drowsily, to herself. "I wonder if I'll ever get to a place where I can always be as serene of spirit as she was, no matter

what happens. I wonder if she ever had anything as upsetting as Brud and Sister to try her nerves in her young days."

As if in answer to her mere thought of them, the two children came racing around the house. They fairly fell into the room, and, throwing themselves across her lap, demanded that she come out at once and see the peacocks. Had they said any other kind of fowl she would have resented the intrusion more than she did, but peacocks recalled Warwick Hall so pleasantly that she got up at once and went with them. She had seen none since leaving school. These had not been near the house on her former visits to the ranch. The stately birds strutted up and down in the sunshine, their tails spread in dazzling gorgeousness.

"They're Sammy's," called Mrs. Barnaby from the kitchen door. "He takes the greatest pride in them. That cock took a prize at the last San Antonio fair."

Mary had met "Sammy" the last time she was at the ranch, and had heard of him ever since her first conversation with Mrs. Barnaby. He was an elderly cousin of her husband's who had made his home with them for years. A few minutes later she came upon the old man in the barnyard. The

children, having once obtained possession of her, had dragged her down there to see a colt that they had discovered.

Sammy was sitting on the fence in his Sunday clothes, busy with his usual Sunday occupation of whittling. His bushy gray beard made him look older than Mr. Barnaby, and the keen glance he gave the children from under his shaggy eyebrows made them sidle away from him. They, too, had met him before, under circumstances which they did not take pleasure in recalling. Only a few moments before he had caught them chasing the ducks until they were dizzy, and stopped them with a sternness that made them wary of him. They had had an encounter with him one day in town also, soon after their arrival in Bauer. They had climbed into the wagon, which he left hitched in front of the grocery, and had poked holes into every package he had piled on the seat, in order to discover what they held. When he came out little streams of rice and sugar and meal were dribbling out all over the wagon. When he started after them with a threatening crack of his whip they escaped by darting into the front door of the butcher shop and out of the back, but they always felt that it was one of the narrowest escapes they

ever made, and that a day of reckoning would come if he ever got close enough to them to reach them with his whip.

It was a trifling disconcerting to come across him suddenly on this peaceful ranch, and they pulled Mary away as soon as they could. She was enjoying the conversation they had drifted into, starting with the colt. He spoke with a strong New England twang, and his quaint sayings and homely comparisons suggested the types and times portrayed in the Bigelow Papers.

Despite her determination not to have her day taken up by the children, Mary found herself devoting the entire morning to their entertainment. Country sights and sounds were so new and strange to them that it seemed selfish not to answer their eager questions, and when their wanderings around the place led them to a deserted cabin where the Indians had once killed two Mexican shepherds, she repeated the thrilling story as she had heard it from Mrs. Barnaby, with all its hair-raising details. When they went in to dinner she had been answering questions and entertaining her pupils for two hours, as diligently as on any week-day.

It was an old-fashioned "turkey dinner" to which they were summoned, and the variety and

deliciousness of the dishes may have had much to do with the children's conduct. They were so quiet and well behaved that Mary watched them in surprise. Beyond yes and no and politely expressed thanks, Brud spoke not at all, and Sister only once. That was to say, when Mrs. Barnaby addressed her as Sister, "Call me Nancy. I'm trying that name now."

Seeing the look of surprise that circled around the table, Mary explained, feeling that Sister, as usual, was enjoying the limelight that this peculiar custom of hers called her into.

"Hump!" exclaimed old Sammy. "Something of a chameleon, eh? If she changes her nature to suit her name it must keep her family busy getting acquainted with her."

"I think it does have some slight influence," answered Mary. "Then she'd better drop the name of Nancy," said old Sammy, with a solemn wag of the head. "In an old blue poetry book that I used to read back in Vermont, it said,

"'Little Nancy would never her mother obey,
But always did choose to have her own way.'

"She came to a frightful end, jumping up and down in her chair.

"'In vain did her mother command her to stop.
Nan only laughed louder and higher did hop,'

till she fell over and cracked her head. The only Nancys I have ever known have all been self-willed like that."

Garrulous Cousin Sammy was only indulging in reminiscence. He had not intended to tease the child, but she resented his remarks, and thrusting out her tongue at him, screwed up her face into the ugliest grimace possible for her to make. Fortunately the arrival of a huge pumpkin pie turned his eyes away from her just then, for Sammy Bradford, old bachelor though he was, had strict New England notions about the rearing of children, which he sometimes burned to put into practice for the good of the general public.

After dinner Mr. Barnaby retired to his room for his usual Sunday nap. Cousin Sammy took his pipe to the sunny bench outside the open door, and Mrs. Barnaby provided for the children's entertainment by bringing out a box of toys that had been left behind at different times by various grandchildren. She arranged them on a side table in the dining-room, with some colored pencils, paper and scissors.

Brud and "Nancy," ever ready to investigate anything new, seated themselves at her bidding, and began to paw over the games and pictures with

apparent interest. Thereupon Mrs. Barnaby and Mary went into the next room, and drawing two big easy chairs into the chimney corner, they settled themselves for a long, cosy *tête-à-tête*. It was the first opportunity Mary had had to explain to Mrs. Barnaby that she had undertaken to teach the children in order to prevent her mother from sewing for other people.

They had had about ten minutes of uninterrupted quiet, when the door opened and "Nancy" walked in with her hat and coat on. Her lips were drawn into a dissatisfied pout, and she threw herself across Mary's lap, whining, "I don't like those old things in there! Tell us about the Forty Thieves *now!*"

"No, Nancy," said Mary, firmly, hoping to appease her by remembering to use the new name. "I told you before you came out here that I'd not tell you a single story to-day."

"But you already have," cried Brud, triumphantly, appearing in the doorway also in coat and hat. "You told us about the Indians killing the shepherds."

"Oh, but that was just a true happening that I told to explain about the cabin we were looking at," was the patient answer. "That was different

from sitting down on purpose to tell you a story, and I shall *not* do that to-day."

"Then come and play with us," demanded Sister, seizing her by the hands, after one keen glance at her to see if she really was in earnest. "Come on, Brud, and help me pull. We'll *make* her come!"

"Sh!" warned Mary, attempting to free herself, as they began shouting and tugging at her. "I came out here to visit Mrs. Barnaby, and I'll not play with you till to-morrow. If you don't want to make pictures or cut paper or work the puzzle games you'll have to go outdoors and amuse yourselves. But you must not make such a noise. Mr. Barnaby is asleep."

"Then if you don't want us to wake him up you've *got* to play with us to keep us still!" cried Brud. "Hasn't she, Sister?"

"Call me Nancy when I tell you!" screamed Sister, in an exasperated tone, stamping her foot. Then, fired by Brud's suggestion, she dropped Mary's hands and darted across the room to the piano, which was standing open in the corner. It was an old-fashioned one, its rosewood case inlaid above the keyboard with mother-of-pearl. The yellow keys were out of tune, but they had never

been touched save by careful fingers, for it was one of Mrs. Barnaby's cherished treasures. Now she rose as if she had been struck herself, as both children began pounding upon it ruthlessly with their fists, making a hideous, discordant din.

"Stop, children! Stop, I say!" she demanded. But her commands fell on unheeding ears, and they pounded away until she laid vigorous hands on them and forcibly dragged them away from the piano. Instantly they struggled out of her grasp, and rushing back, pounded the keys harder than before. Mary, who had never seen them act like this, was distressed beyond measure that she had been the cause, even though the unwilling one, of such an invasion. She started to the rescue, thinking savagely that they would have to be gagged and tied, hand and foot, and that she would take pleasure in helping do it.

Old Sammy reached them first, however, his Puritanical soul resenting both the disobedience and the Sabbath-breaking uproar. With one swoop he caught up a child under each arm, and carried them kicking and struggling out-of-doors.

"Here ye'll stay the rest of the afternoon!" he announced, in a gruff voice, as he put them down. "There's all out-of-doors to play in, and if you

so much as step over the door-sill into that room until I give ye leave, I'll *withe* ye!"

It was a mysterious threat, since neither child had ever heard the word *withe* before, and he said it in a deep, awful voice that made Brud think creepily of the Fee-fi-fo-fum giant in his picture-book at home, who went about smelling blood and saying, *"Dead or alive, I will have some!"*

For a moment they stood in awed silence, gaping at the only person who had ever intimidated them; then Sister, in a blind rage, seized his clay pipe that he had put down on the bench, and threw it with all her force on the stone floor of the porch.

"You let me alone!" she shrieked, as she darted away from him. "You — you — you old *Billygoat,* you!" It was the sight of his gray beard that finally suggested to her choking wrath a name ugly enough to hurl at him. Then she took to her heels down the grassy lane, Brud following as fast as possible.

"There's nothing for me to do but follow them," said Mary, starting into the bedroom for her hat and coat, which had been laid away in there. "I'd feel so responsible if they should get hurt, and there are so many things on a big place like this that they are not used to."

"Now, don't you worry," interrupted old Sammy. "I'll keep *my* eye on them."

He was quite red in the face with vexation over the loss of his pipe, which lay in several pieces on the floor, and Mrs. Barnaby, knowing him well, prevailed on Mary to come back to her easy-chair.

"You leave them to him," she insisted, in a laughing aside. "He's so mad that he'll watch them like a hawk, just for the pleasure of pouncing down on them again if they cut up any more didoes; but his bark is worse than his bite, and they'll be perfectly safe with him."

So Mary allowed herself to be drawn back to their interrupted conversation, but she could not rid herself of an uneasy feeling that kept obtruding itself into her thoughts, even when she was most interested.

If Brud and Sister had deliberately planned a revenge on the old man who had forced them into exile and temporary obedience, they could not have chosen anything which would have hurt him worse than their next prank. Their wild chase down the lane had been brought to a sudden stop by the sight of the lordly peacock, strutting back and forth in the barn-yard, his beautiful tail spread wide in the

sun. They climbed up on the gate to watch it, and, hanging over the top bar, admired it in almost breathless ecstasy for several minutes. The irridescent shimmer of the gorgeous eyes in its tail started a dispute.

"That's why you can't ever catch a peacock," Brud asserted, "'cause with all those eyes in its tail it can see you coming up behind it."

"Aw, goosey," contradicted Nancy, "it sees with its two little *head* eyes. Those feather eyes in its tail can't see."

"They can!"

"They can't!"

The two words were bandied back and forth, the dispute promising to go on indefinitely, till Brud's triumphant, "Ten million times *can,*" was answered by Nancy's final, "Million billion times *can't!* So there."

"We'll prove it," was Brud's next taunt. "Try and see if you can catch him."

"All right," was the willing assent. "And if the feathers come out of his tail as easy as they did out of Mis' Williams' red rooster, won't that old man be mad!"

In the meantime Sammy had gone into the house to hunt among his possessions for a certain corn-

cob pipe, to take the place of the clay one just broken. The mantel-shelf in his room was as crowded as the corner of an old junk shop, so it took some time for him to find what he was searching for. He had taken it down and was slowly filling it, when the sound of a wild commotion in the barn-yard made him hurry to the door. Turkeys, guineas, ducks, hens, — everything that could gobble or flutter or squawk, were doing their utmost to attract someone's attention. And the cause of it all, or, rather, the two causes, were standing by the watering-trough, comparing the spoils of the chase. They had crept up behind the peacock, despite his thousand eyes, and caught him by the tail. Each proudly clutched a handful of long, trailing feathers, and the bird, miserably conscious that his glory had been torn from him, had taken refuge under the corn-crib.

"You outrageous little Hittites!" roared old Sammy, coming upon them suddenly and seeing the feathers. Then a real chase began.

A little while later, Mary paused in the middle of a sentence to say, "Listen! Didn't that sound like the children crying or calling?"

Mrs. Barnaby, who was slightly deaf, shook her head. "No, I think not. Anyhow, Sammy is look-

ing after them. He won't let them come to any real harm. What was it we were talking about? Oh, yes! Those heirloom candlesticks."

More than an hour afterward a shadow darkened the doorway for an instant as Sammy strode past it on his way across the porch.

"Mr. Bradford," called Mary. "Do you know where the children are?"

At her call he turned back to the door, holding out a great handful of peacock feathers which he was taking sorrowfully to his room.

"Those pesky little varmints!" he exclaimed, still wrathful, "They've teetotally ruined that cock's looks. Yes, I know where they are. I've had them shut up in the corn-crib till a minute ago."

"Shut up in the corn-crib!" echoed Mary and Mrs. Barnaby in the same breath.

"Yes, as I told 'em, they haven't any more idea of other people's rights than weasels, and it's high time they are being taught."

"Well, do you think they've learned their lesson in one dose, Sammy?" asked Mr. Barnaby, dryly, coming out from his room in time to hear his cousin's speech.

"That remains to be seen," spluttered Sammy,

as he strode on to his room. "They were sniffling and snubbing considerable when I let them out. I don't think they'll chase *my* peacock any more."

The "sniffling and snubbing" changed into out-and-out crying as soon as they reached Mary's side, and that was followed by heart-broken wails and demands to be taken home. Nothing comforted them. Nothing could turn them aside from their belief that they had been abused and must be taken back immediately to mommey.

After nearly half an hour spent in vain attempts to silence them, Mrs. Barnaby said in sheer desperation, "Well, James, you'll just have to hitch up and take them back, even if it is so early. I hate to have Mary's visit cut short, but they'd spoil it worse if they stayed. If I only felt free to give them a good sound spanking now — "

She did not finish the sentence, but looked over her spectacles so sternly that the children backed away, lest a feeling of liberty might suddenly descend upon her.

As Mary pinned on her hat before the mirror in the bedroom, she turned to her hostess with a hunted look in her eyes.

"Do you ever get desperate over things?" she asked. "That's the way I am now. I'm so tired

of those children that the very sound of their voices sets my teeth on edge. If I only could have had this one whole day away from them I might have been able to go on with them to-morrow, but now it seems as if I can't! I just *can't!*"

"I don't wonder, you poor child," was the sympathetic answer.

"The worst of it is, I'm utterly discouraged," confessed Mary, almost tearfully. "I've been pluming myself on the fact that my two weeks' work had amounted to something; that I'd really made an impression, and given them all sorts of good ideas. But you see it isn't worth a row of pins. They are good only so long as I'm exercising like an acrobat, mind and body, to keep them entertained. The minute I stop they don't pay the slightest attention to my wishes."

"Maybe you've done too much for them," said Mrs. Barnaby, shrewdly guessing the root of the trouble. "You told them it was a surprise school. Let the next surprise be a different sort. Turn them loose and make them hunt their own entertainment."

"As they did to-day," Mary answered, with a shrug. "They'd run home howling and their mother would think I was incapable and give my

place to someone else. No, we must have the money, so I'll have to go on and put in my best licks, no matter how I detest it."

When she drew on her gloves she was so near to tears that the little bloodstone ring on her hand looked so dim she could scarcely see it. But it made her glance up with a smile into the benevolent old face above her, and she stripped back the glove from her finger with a dramatic gesture.

"See?" she said, brightly, exhibiting the ring. "By the bloodstone on my finger, I'll keep my oath until the going down of one more sun."

"You're a brave little girl. That's what you are!" said Mrs. Barnaby, stooping to kiss her good-bye. Only that week she had read *The Jester's Sword,* from which Mary was quoting, and she knew what grim determination lay beneath the light tone.

"I guess it will help you the same way it did the poor Jester, to remember that it's only one day at a time you're called on to endure. And another thing," she added, trying to put as many consoling thoughts into their parting as possible, "If you *do* succeed in teaching them anything that'll help to snatch them as brands from the burning, it will count for a star in your crown just as much as

if you'd gone out and converted the heathen on 'India's coral strand.'"

"It's not stars in my crown I'm working for," laughed Mary. "It's for pence in my purse." Nevertheless the suggestion stayed with her all the way home. When conversation flagged, she filled the silences with pleasant snatches of day-dreams, in which she saw herself becoming to these benighted little creatures, asleep on either side of her, the inspiration that Madam Chartley was to everyone who crossed the threshold of Warwick Hall.

"I've just *got* to do something to make them see themselves as they look to other people," she thought, desperately. "But the question is, *what?*"

A hard problem indeed for one who, in many ways, was still only a child herself.

CHAPTER X

IN JOYCE'S STUDIO

It was a wild, blustery day in March, two months after Mary's interrupted visit at the ranch. Joyce Ware, sitting before the glowing wood fire in the studio, high up on the top floor of a New York apartment house, had never known such a lonesome Sunday. The winds that rattled the casements and sent alternate dashes of rain and snow against the panes had kept her house-bound all day.

Usually she was glad to have one of these shut-in days, after a busy week, when she could sit and do nothing with a clear conscience. Every moan of the wind in the chimney and every glimpse of the snow-whitened roofs below her windows, emphasized the luxurious comfort of the big room. She had had a hard week, trying to crowd into it some special orders for Easter cards. A year ago she would not have added them to her regular work, but now she was afraid to turn anything away which might help to swell the size of the check

she must send home every month. If the days were not long enough to do the tasks she set for herself at a comfortable pace, she simply worked harder — feverishly, if need be, to finish them.

She had been practically alone the entire day, for the two members of the household who were at home were staying in their own rooms. Lucy Boyd had a cold, and her devoted little aunt was nursing her with the care of the traditional hen for its one chicken. Mrs. Boyd had not allowed Lucy to leave her room even for her Sunday dinner, but had carried it in to her with her own on a tray. As Miss Henrietta Robbins was spending the week-end in the country, Joyce did not take the trouble to set the table for herself, but ate her own dinner in the little kitchenette.

Afterward, to make the day as different as possible from the six others in the week, in which she sat at her easel from morning till night in a long-sleeved gingham apron, she went into her room and put on a dress of her own designing, soft and trailing and of a warm wine-red. Pushing a great sleepy-hollow chair close enough to the hearth for the tips of her slippers to rest on the shining brass fender-rail, she settled herself among the cushions

with a book which she had long been trying to find time to read.

The story, like the bleak outdoor world, seemed to accentuate her sense of shelter and comfort, but at the same time it somehow emphasized her loneliness. Now and then, when her eyes grew tired, she paused for a moment to look around her. There were several things which gave her keen pleasure every time her attention was called to them, which she felt ought to be enough of themselves to dispel her vague depression: the odor of growing mignonette, the sunny yellow of the pot of daffodils on the black teakwood table, the gleam of firelight on the brasses, and the warm shadows it cast on the trailing folds of her wine-red dress.

That lighting was exactly what she wanted for some drapery folds which she would be putting on a magazine cover next week. She studied the effect, thinking lazily that if it were not her one day of rest, she would get out palate and brushes, and make a sketch of what she wanted to keep, while it was before her.

She read for over two hours. When the story came to an unhappy ending she dropped the book, wishing she had never come across such a tale of misfortune and misunderstanding. It depressed

her strangely, and presently, as she sat looking into the fire, the unbroken quiet of the big room gave her an overwhelming sense of loneliness that was like an ache.

"I'd give anything to walk in and see what they're all doing at home right now," she thought, as she stared into the red embers, "but I can't even picture them as they really are, because they are no longer living in any place that I ever called home."

The thought of their being off in a strange little Texas town that she had never seen made her feel far more forlorn and apart than she would have felt could she have imagined them with any of the familiar backgrounds she had once shared with them. They seemed as far away and out of reach as they had been that winter in France, when she used to climb up in Monsieur Greyville's pear tree and cry for sheer homesickness. That was years ago, and before the Gate of the Giant Scissors had opened to give her a playmate, but she recalled, as if it were but yesterday, the performance that often took place in the pear tree.

She began by repeating that couplet from *Snow-bound,* —

> "The dear home faces, whereupon
> The fitful firelight paled and shone."

It was like a charm, for it always brought a blur of tears through which she could see, as in a magic mirror, each home face as she had seen it oftenest in the little brown house in Plainsville. There was her mother, so patient and gentle and tired, bending over the sewing which never came to an end; and Jack, charging home from school like a young whirlwind to do his chores and get out to play. She could see Mary, with her dear earnest little freckled face and beribboned pigtails, always so eager to help, even when she was so small that she had to stand on a soap-box to reach the dish-pan. Such a capable, motherly little atom she was then, looking after the wants of Holland and the baby untiringly.

Despite the ache in her throat, a smile crossed Joyce's face now and then, as she went on calling up other scenes. They had had hard work at the Wigwam, and had felt the pinch of poverty, but she had never known a family who found more to laugh over and enjoy when they looked back over their hard times. But now — the change was more than she could bear to think of. Jack a hopeless cripple, Mary tied down to the uncongenial work that she had to take up as a bread-winner, when she ought to be free to enjoy the

best part of her girlhood as other girls were doing. Tears came into Joyce's eyes as she brooded over the pictures she had conjured up. Then she rose, and trailing into her bedroom, came back with a lapful of letters; all that the family had written her since leaving Lone Rock four months ago. Dropping on the hearth-rug, she arranged them in little piles beside her, according to their dates, and beginning at the first, proceeded to read them through in order. They did bring the family nearer, as she had expected them to do, but the later ones brought such a weight of foreboding with their second reading, that presently she buried her face in the cushions of the chair against which she was leaning, and began to cry as she had not cried for nearly a year. Not since the first news of Jack's accident, had she given way to such a storm of tears.

It was some time before she sobbed herself quiet, and then she still sat with her head in the cushions, till she heard the faint buzz of an electric door-bell. It sounded so far away that she thought it was the bell of the adjoining apartment, and gave it no more than a passing thought. So, too, the sound of an opening door, of an umbrella dropped into a hat-rack, of voices, seemed to have but a

vague connection with her world. Then she was startled by hearing Mrs. Boyd's voice at the portière saying:

"Joyce, dear, here is Mr. Tremont to see you. Ah! I *knew* you were asleep. He rang twice, so I answered the bell."

Phil Tremont, pausing between the portières as Mrs. Boyd slipped back to Lucy, caught only a glimpse of Joyce's red dress trailing through the opposite doorway. The scattered letters on the rug bore witness to her hurried flight.

"Come on in to the fire, Phil," she called, through the partly closed door. "Poke it up and make yourself at home. I'll be out in a minute. I never dreamed of such joy as a caller on this dreadful day, or I should have been sitting up in state, waiting to receive you!"

The laughing reply he sent back brightened her spirits as if by magic. The next best thing to having one of her own family suddenly appear, was the pleasure of seeing the friend who had made one of their home circle so often and so intimately in the old Wigwam days which she had just been crying over. Hastily smoothing her rumpled hair, bathing her eyes and fluffing a powder-puff over her nose to take away the shine which

her tear-sopped handkerchief had left on it, she came out to find him standing before the fire, looking down suspiciously at the scattered letters.

As he stepped forward with a hearty hand-clasp, she felt that the keen glance he gave her was a question, and answered as if he had spoken aloud.

"No, I wasn't asleep, as Mrs. Boyd thought. I was just having a good old-fashioned cry — a regular bawl! I don't get a chance to indulge in such an orgy of weeps often, but now the storm is over and it has cleared the atmosphere for another year or so."

"What is it, Joyce? Bad news from home? Is Jack worse?"

Phil's voice was so sympathetic, his real concern so evident, that Joyce could not trust herself to answer immediately. She stooped and began to pick up the letters.

"I — I'm afraid I boasted too soon about the storm being over. You'll have to talk about something else for awhile, or I might tune up again."

"All right," he answered, in a soothing tone, reaching down to help her gather up the letters. "That suits me, anyhow, for I came on purpose to bring you a rare bit of news concerning the Tremont family."

In her present mood the mere sight of Phil's broad shoulders was a comfort. They might not be able to lift her actual burdens, but she felt their willingness, and his unspoken sympathy steadied her like an outstretched hand. Now with the consideration that was one of his most lovable traits, he gave her time to compose herself, by rattling on in a joking way about himself.

"I've come a long distance in the rain and snow to tell my news. I've torn myself away from all the wiles of Stuart and Eugenia to keep their only brother with them. I've braved the dangers of Greater New York and defied the elements in order to be the bearer of such important tidings, and you needn't think I'm going to give it to you as if it were any common bit of information. I tell you what I'll do. You may have three guesses. If you fail you pay a forfeit, say — an invitation to supper, with the privilege of my helping get it ready in that tabloid kitchen of yours."

"That is highly satisfactory," agreed Joyce, whose voice was under control by this time. She drew her chair a trifle closer to the fire, and, leaning her elbows on her knees, looked into the embers for inspiration.

"It concerns the Tremont family," she mused.

"That means all of you. Well, it must be that the old tangle about your great-aunt Patricia's holdings in England has been settled and you're coming into some money after all these years."

"No; guess again."

Picking up the long brass tongs, she began to trace pictures on the sooty background of the chimney while she tried to think of a better answer.

"It concerns *all* of you!"

"Yes."

With his hands in his pockets, Phil walked over to the window and stood looking out over the wide stretch of city roofs below, now almost hidden by the rapidly deepening twilight. He was smiling while he waited, and humming half under his breath a song that his old English nurse used to sing to him and his sister Elsie: "Maid Elsie roams by lane and lea." He had whistled it almost constantly the last few days:

> "Kling! lang-ling!
> She seems to hear her bride-bells ring,
> Her bonnie bride-bells ring!"

He hummed it again when Joyce's second guess was wrong, while he waited for the third. Then, when it, too, was wide of the mark and she demanded to be told, he began it again; but this time

he sang it meaningly, and loud enough to fill the room with the deep, sweet notes:

"A year by seas, a year by lands,
A year since then has died,
And Elsie at the altar stands,
Her sailor at her side.
While kling! lang! ling!
Their bonnie bride-bells gaily ring!"

Joyce's face grew bright with sudden understanding as he finished, and she cried, "Elsie is to be married! Is *that* what you came to tell me?"

"Yes, my littlest, onliest sister is to be married, immediately after Easter, out in California, in the Gold-of-Ophir rose-garden you have heard so much about. We are all going — Daddy and Stuart and Eugenia and little Patricia and your obedient servant, 'Pat's Pill,' himself."

He left the window, and stretching himself out in the big chair opposite hers, gave her the details that she instantly demanded.

"Elsie's sailor lad is a navy surgeon. The wedding is to be in the rose-garden, because there is where they first met, and there is where Elsie has had all the best times of her life. She has always lived with mother's people, you know, since our home was broken up, and even before mother's death, we used to spend our winters there. Yes,

Daddy opposed the marriage at first, but you know Daddy. He'd hardly think an archangel good enough for Elsie."

The news had the effect which Phil had foreseen, and Joyce's own affairs retired into the background, while she discussed the matter which was of such vital importance to the whole Tremont family. Later, he asked her to name all the things she considered the most desirable and unique as wedding gifts, and they were still adding to the list from which he was to make his choice, when they heard Mrs. Boyd come out into the hall to turn on the light. In the bright firelight, they had not noticed how dark it had grown outside. Joyce looked at the clock and sprang up, exclaiming:

"Lucy will be wanting her cream toast, and it's time also for me to pay my forfeit to you. How much of a supper are you going to claim, young man?"

"That depends on how many good left-overs there are in the pantry and ice-box," said Phil, rising also. "I'll come and investigate, myself, thank you."

Pinning up the train of her red gown and tying on a big apron, Joyce made quick work of her supper preparations, and the long, lonely day ended

in a jolly little feast, which completely restored her to her usual cheerful outlook on life. Mrs. Boyd joined them, despite the fact that she must leave Lucy to eat alone, in order to do so. It was always a red-letter day in her drab existence when Phil Tremont came into it. She was such a literal little body, that she never joked herself. She was mentally incapable of the repartee that always flew back and forth across the table when Phil was a guest, but she considered his tamest sallies as positively brilliant. When she went back to Lucy she had enough material to furnish conversation all the rest of the evening.

"Now," said Phil, when he and Joyce were back in the studio again, before the fire, "I don't want to upset your equanimity, but if you can talk about it calmly, I'd like to hear exactly how things are going with Jack and Aunt Emily and that little brick of a Mary. I had one letter from Jack the first of the winter, and I've had the casual reports you've given me at long intervals, but I've no adequate idea of their whereabouts or their present sayings and doings."

"Suppose I read you some of Mary's letters," proposed Joyce. "I've been surprised at the gift she's developed lately for describing her surround-

ings. Really, she's done some first-class word-pictures."

In answer to his pleased assent, Joyce turned over the letters till she came to the first one that Mary had written from Bauer.

"It was written on pieces of a paper sugar-sack while she was getting supper," explained Joyce. "But you can fairly see the little town spread out between the spire of St. Peter's and the tower of the Holy Angels' Academy, with the windmills in between and the new moon low on the horizon."

Phil, lounging back in the big chair, sat with a smile on his face as he listened to Mary's account of the rector's call, while she was perched up on the windmill. But when Joyce reached the closing paragraph about its being a good old world after all, and her belief in Grandmother Ware's verse that the crooked should be made straight and the rough places smooth, a very tender light shone in his keen eyes. He said in a low tone, "The dear little Vicar! She's game to the core!"

Urged to read more, Joyce went on, sometimes choosing only an extract here and there, sometimes reading an entire letter, till he had heard all about her visit to Gay, her first experience at a military hop, their brave attempt to make a merry Christ-

mas among strangers, and finally her experience with the Mallory children, because of their desperate need of money.

"Don't skip!" insisted Phil, still laughing over her account of her "day of rest" at the Barnaby ranch, when the peacock lost its tail.

"The next one isn't funny," replied Joyce, "but it is especially interesting to me because it shows how Mary is growing up."

She hunted through the disordered pile until she found one dated two months ago.

"'The night after I brought Brud and Sister back from the ranch I lay awake for hours, trying to think what to do next to find the vulnerable spot in my *kleinen teufel*. I couldn't think of a thing, but decided to begin telling them Kipling's jungle stories instead of any more fairy-tales, and to try Mrs. Barnaby's suggestion of making them responsible for their own entertainment part of the time.'

"Oh, this isn't the one I thought," exclaimed Joyce. "It goes on to tell about the last news from Holland, instead of the children. Here is the one I wanted, written two weeks later:

"'Hail, Columbia, happy land! I've found the "open sesame," thanks to Kipling, and in a way I little expected. The children showed a breathless

interest in the Jungle stories from the start, and began dramatizing them of their own accord. They have thrown themselves into the play with a zest which nothing of my proposing has ever called out. For two weeks I have been old Baloo, the Brown Bear, and Father Wolf by turns. There are two little hairless man-cubs in our version, however, for a Mowglina divides honors with Mowgli. Sister says she has chosen the name of Mowglina "for keeps," and I sincerely hope she has, if what Mr. Sammy Bradford said about names having a moral effect on her is true.

"'We have our Council Rock up on the high hill back of St. Peter's, where Meliss sometimes plays the part of the Black Panther. We no longer greet each other with "Good morning." It is "Good Hunting" now, and when we part, it is with the benediction, "Jungle favor go with thee!" You remember Baloo taught the wood and water laws to Mowgli, how to tell a rotten branch from a sound one, how to speak politely to the wild bees when he came upon a hive of them, etc. But more than all he taught the Master Words of the Jungle, that turned every bird, beast and snake into a friend. It is simply amazing to me the way they seemed to be charmed by that idea, and it is strange

that such utterly lawless children should be not only willing but eager to abide by the rules laid down for animals. It does my soul good to hear Brud, who has never obeyed anyone, gravely declaim:

> "'"Now these are the laws of the Jungle,
> And many and mighty are they,
> But the head and the hoof of the law
> And the haunch and the hump is — *obey!*"

"'Or to hear saucy little Sister in the role of Mowglina, repeating Kaa's words to Uncle August, "A brave heart *and a courteous tongue,* they will carry thee far through the Jungle, manling."

"'It was Uncle August, bless his old brown body, who helped me to make my first personal application of the play. I had just heard of their latest prank down-town. (Sad to say, the more angelic they are as little wolves, the more annoying they are when they return to the Man-pack.) They had dropped a live garter snake, a good-sized one, through the slit of the package box, and the postmistress had picked it up with a bundle of newspapers. She was so frightened that she yelled like a Comanche, and then had a nervous chill that lasted for a quarter of an hour. That same day they filled all the keyholes of the private letter-

boxes with chewing-gum, as far up as they could reach, and everybody who had to stop to pry it out was *so* cross.

"'I didn't say anything to them about it till after they had told me about Uncle August's chasing the calves out of Mrs. Williams' garden, and how she had petted and praised him for it. We talked a few minutes about the way Uncle August is beloved by everybody who knows him, and how even strangers on the street stop to pat his head or say something kind about him.

"'"It's because he keeps every Law of the Jungle, for dogs," I told them, and then I said, quite mercilessly, "but the whole town looks on you two children as *Banderlogs!* Mere, senseless monkey-folks, outcasts who have no leaders and no laws!" Really, it hurt them dreadfully and I felt almost cruel for saying it. I could see that the shot told when I reminded them how they had been turned out of the hotel and chased out of every store in town. I told them that people said ugly things about them behind their backs, just as Kaa and Baloo did about the silly gray Apes who threw dirt and sticks and made mischief wherever they went.

"'That was the climax. They both threw them-

selves across my lap and began to cry, protesting that they were *not* Banderlogs. They didn't want people to call them that. I think my good angel must have inspired me to make the little sermon that I gave them then, for I certainly had never thought of the analogy before — how the same thing that is true in the Jungle holds good in the Man-world; that we must learn the Master Words for each person we meet, so that every heart will understand when we call out, "We be of one blood, ye and I." That just as the elephants and kites and snakes became friendly to Mowgli as soon as he learned the Master Words of their speech, so Miss Edna and the postmistress and old Mr. Sammy would be friendly to them, when they showed that they not only had brave hearts, which scorned to play little, mean, silly tricks, but *courteous tongues* as well.

"'The amazing part of it is that they understood me perfectly, and right then and there had a sort of spiritual awakening to the fact that they really are "of one blood" with these people they have been tormenting. It is pathetic to watch how hard they have been trying ever since, to convince people that they are *not* Banderlogs, but are sensible children, willing to be governed by laws that

they never understood before. Now, at parting, they insist on my repeating *all* the verse:

> "'"Wood and water, wind and tree,
> *Wisdom, strength and courtesy,*
> Jungle favor go with thee."

They seem to believe that it verily holds some sort of hoodoo spell which will armor them with magic power to make friends.

"'Already Sister has made peace with the postmistress by the gift of a crude little willow basket of her own weaving, filled with wildflowers. It met with such a gracious reception (due principally to private explanation beforehand) that Sister fairly squirmed with the blessedness of giving, — her first real experience of that sort. Brud used his hatchet to split a pine box into kindling, and presented the same, tied in neat bundles, to Mrs. Williams. Her surprise and voluble thanks (also solicited beforehand) were so gratifying that Brud came home so satisfied with the new application of the game that he burns to play it with everyone in Bauer, proving with actions, if not words, that he has a right to say, "We be of one blood, ye and I," and that he is *not* a Banderlog.'"

As Joyce slipped the letter back into its envelope, Phil leaned forward to put another log on the fire,

saying, as he did so, "Good for Mary! She always manages to find some way out, and it is always a way no one else would think of. But somehow I can't quite place her in these letters. She's the same little bunch of energy that I've always known, and yet there's a difference. I can't quite make out what."

"She's growing up, I tell you," answered Joyce. "That's what makes the difference. Listen to this one:

"'Yesterday being Valentine's day, we had a picnic at the Council Rock. The hill rises straight up from the public road, just back of the Mallory cottage and St. Peter's. There is a roundabout road to the top, leading in from a back lane, which is easy to climb, but, of course, the children chose the steep trail starting near their gate. Nothing but a goat could walk up it with perfect ease and safety.

"'Once at the top, the view is lovely. You can see over half the county, and look right down into the chimneys of the town. The whole hilltop is covered with wildflowers; strange, beautiful things I have never seen before — so many exquisite colors, you'd think a rainbow had been broken to bits and scattered over the ground.

"'At one o'clock we started out of the Mallory

gate, the most grotesque procession that ever went down the pike of Bauer. You see, we'd dropped the Jungle game for the day, and they were doing St. Valentine honor. I went first in my oldest dress, on account of the climb, my Mexican hat on my head, my alarm-clock, as usual, in one hand and a thermos bottle in the other. I was taking some boiling water along to make them tea, as a great treat. They don't like it particularly, but they wanted to use a little Japanese tea-set that had just been sent to them.

"'Sister, fired by some of my descriptions of Valentine costumes, had elected to attend the picnic as the Queen of Hearts, and had dressed herself for the part with the assistance of Meliss. She looked perfectly ridiculous, spotted all over with turkey-red calico hearts. They were sewed on her dress, her hat, and even her black stockings. She was as badly broken out with them as a measles patient would have been with a red rash.

"'Brud wouldn't let her dike him out in the same way. She wanted him to go as Cupid. He consented to let her call him Cupid and he carried a bow and arrow, and wore some of the trimmings, but he wore them in his own way. The white turkey-wings, which she tried to attach to his shoul-

derblades, he wore bound to his brow like an Indian chieftain's war-bonnet. Long-suffering Uncle August frisked about in a most remarkable costume. I think it must have been made of the top section of Brud's pajamas, with the sleeves pulled up over his front paws, and buttoned in the back. It was sprinkled with big hearts, some blue and some yellow.

"'But, funny as they looked, Meliss was the comic Valentine of the occasion. The front of her was covered with an old lace window curtain. Across her bosom, carefully fastened with a gilt paper arrow, was the lithographed picture of a big red heart, as fat and red and shiny as a ripe tomato. She carried the lunch basket.

"'I must confess it staggered me a trifle when the procession came out to meet me, but they were so pleased with themselves I hadn't the heart to suggest a single change. I led on, hoping that we wouldn't meet anyone. Well, we hadn't gone a hundred paces till we heard hoof-beats, and a solitary horseman came riding along behind us. Brud looked back and then piped up in his shrill little voice:

"'"Oh, look, Miss Mayry! Look at the soldier man coming!"

"'Naturally, I glanced back, and my blood fairly ran cold, for there, riding along with a broad grin on his face at sight of our ridiculous turnout, was Lieutenant Boglin! I was so amazed at seeing him that I just stood still in the road and stared, feeling my face get redder and redder. Somehow I had no power to move. He didn't recognize me till he was opposite us, but the instant he did, he was off his horse and coming up to shake hands, and I was trying to account for our appearance. It seems he had been with the troops up at Leon Springs for target practice, and was taking a day off while they were breaking camp. He had been commissioned to look at a polo pony somebody had for sale in Bauer, and thought while he was about it he would call and see the Ware family, after he had had dinner at the hotel. He was on his way there.

"'Well, there I was! I couldn't ask him to go on such a babyfied lark as our Valentine picnic. I couldn't leave the children and take him over home, because my time is Mrs. Mallory's. Even if she had excused me, the children would have raised an unstoppable howl, and probably would have followed us. They are making grand strides in the courtesy business, but they are still far from being models of propriety.

"'When I had explained to the best of my ability, I told him I would be through at five, and asked him to wait and take supper with us. I could see that he was inwardly convulsed, and I do believe it was because we all looked so ridiculous and he wanted to see the show a second time that he accepted my invitation with alacrity. As soon as he started on to the Williams House, I stopped under a tree and wrote a scrawl to mamma on the margin of the newspaper that was spread on top of the lunch-basket. Then I gave Meliss a dime to run over home with it, so that the family needn't be taken by surprise if Bogey happened to get there before I did.

"'But it seems that he forgot the directions I gave him for finding the house, and about ten minutes to five, as the children and Meliss were finishing the lunch which was spread out on the Council Rock, he came climbing up the side of the hill. The children had been angelic before his arrival and they were good after he came, except — I can't explain it — there was something almost impish in the way they sat and watched us, listening to everything we said, as if they were committing it to memory to repeat afterward. Even Uncle August, in his heart-covered pajamas, squatted sol-

emnly on the rock beside them and seemed to be stowing away something to remember.

"'The lieutenant couldn't glance in their direction without laughing out loud; they looked so utterly comical. So he turned his back on them and began to admire the view, which certainly was magnificent. As the sun began to go down the wind came up, and the veil I had tied around my hat got loose, and streamed out like a comet's tail. I couldn't tie it down and I couldn't find a pin to fasten it, and first thing I knew he had taken one of those fancy bronze pins from the collar of his uniform, those crossed guns that officers wear, you know, and he gave me that to fasten my veil with.

"'Now, there was nothing remarkable in that. Gay and Roberta have whole rows of such pins that different officers have given them. But Sister pointed her finger at me and shrilled out like a katydid, as if they had been discussing the subject before, "No, sir, Brud! You can't fool *me!* He *is* Miss Mayry's valentine. He's her *beau!*"

"'Unless you could have heard the elfish way she said it, you couldn't understand why it should have embarrassed me so dreadfully. My face felt as hot as a fiery furnace. He sort of smiled and pretended not to hear, and I couldn't think of a

word to break the awful pause. But just then the alarm-clock, hanging on a bush behind us, went off with a whang and clatter that sent us both springing to our feet.

"'They had finished their lunch by that time, so I helped Meliss hustle the dishes into the basket and headed the party for home as soon as possible. You can imagine the deep breath of thankfulness I drew when I finally left them at their own gate. But I drew it too soon. I should have waited until we were out of earshot. For as they went racing up the path to meet their mother, we could hear them shrieking to her about Miss Mayry's valentine beau who gave her two teeny, weeny guns to pin her veil with.

"'The wind wasn't blowing so hard down where we were then, so as we went along I said in a careless sort of way, "Oh, — 'lest we forget' — I'll return this now," and started to take it out of my veil. But he only laughed and said, with such a mischievous glance, "No, keep it, 'Miss Mayry,' lest you forget — your valentine."

"'Fortunately, it was one of Jack's good days, and he was able to be out in the sitting-room, and the two took to each other at once. You know nobody can give people quite such a gentle, gracious

reception as mamma can, and much as I had dreaded taking him into such a barely furnished little house, and serving him from our motley collection of dishes, I didn't mind it at all after she had made him welcome. Such things don't matter so much when you've a family you can be proud of.

" ' We had a delicious supper, and he ate and ate, and said nothing had tasted so good since he left home years ago to enlist. He stayed till ten o'clock, and then went down to the livery stable to get his horse and ride back to camp by moonlight. We sat up for nearly an hour after he left, comparing notes on how we had enjoyed the evening, and talking over all he had said. Jack said it was like coming across a well in a thirsty desert to meet a fellow like that, and mamma said she was sure he had enjoyed his little taste of simple home life quite as much as we had enjoyed having him. He quite captivated her, especially when he asked permission to come again. Norman was so impressed that he has been talking ever since about the advantages of being an army man. As for me, I found him lots more interesting than he was the night of the hop, although I must say I'll always remember him as a sort of guardian angel that night, for being so kind and saving me from being a wall-flower.' "

There was a peculiar expression on Phil's face as Joyce laid down that letter.

"Do you know," he said, gravely, "I feel as if I'd been seeing the little Vicar grow up right under my very eyes. I'd never before thought of her as being old enough to have 'affairs,' but this seems to give promise of blossoming into one. Of course, it's what one might naturally expect, but somehow I can't quite get used to the idea, and —"

He did not finish the sentence aloud, but as he scowled into the fire, he added to himself, "*I don't like it!*"

CHAPTER XI

PHIL GOES TO WARWICK HALL

Had it not been for that package of letters read aloud before the fire on that stormy March night, this story might have had a very different ending. But for them Phil never would have known what a winsome, unselfish character the little Vicar had grown up to be. The casual meetings of years could not have revealed her to him as did these intimate glimpses of her daily life and thought, through her letters to Joyce.

They showed her childishly jubilant in her delight when the first month's salary was paid into her hands, and yet practical and womanly in her plans for spending it. Like a child she was, too, in her laments over some of the mistakes which her inexperience led her into with Brud and Sister, yet he could see plainly underneath her whimsical words her deep earnestness of purpose. At last she had recognized that this opportunity to impress them with her high ideals was one of the King's calls, and she was bending every energy to the

keeping of that tryst. It was this development of character which interested Phil, even more than the news of the letters. Still there were a number of items which gave him something to think about. Lieutenant Boglin had made a second visit. Once she mentioned a book he had sent her, and another time a rare butterfly to add to the new collection she was starting. Evidently they had found several interests in common.

On his last visit she had taken him to Fernbank in the boat, and he had captured a fine big hairy tarantula for her from among the roots of a clump of maidenhair ferns. She had been able to enjoy the boat a great deal more since the children had learned the meaning of the word obey. She could take them with her now without fear of their rocking the boat, and in consequence they had had many a delightful hour on the water that had not been possible before.

"Do you know," said Phil, slowly, when he had listened awhile longer, "it doesn't strike me that those are particularly doleful letters; at any rate, anything to send you into an 'orgy of weeps.' I believe it is nothing but the weather which gave you the spell of doldrums that you were in when I came."

"Oh, but you haven't heard the latest ones," Joyce exclaimed. "Mamma's reports of Jack's condition and Jack's own little pencilled scrawls. I can read between the lines just what a desperate fight he is making, and this last one from Mary simply knocked all the props out from under the hope I had been clinging to."

She picked up the last envelope on the pile, postmarked March first, and turned to the closing pages:

"'Jack is so much worse that I can scarcely think of anything else. We are *so* worried about him. He is in bed all the time now, and is growing so thin and weak. He is very despondent, — something new for him. It keeps us busy trying to think of things to tempt his appetite or to arouse him out of his listlessness. He has always been so cheerful before — so full of jokes and so responsive to any attempt to amuse him. But now he doesn't seem to want to talk or to be read to or anything. Once in a while he'll smile a wan little sort of smile when I repeat some of the children's doings, but he isn't like himself any more. Sometimes I believe he's just worn out with the long effort he's made to be brave and keep up for our sake.

"'It is hard for me to keep my interest in the

children keyed up to the proper pitch any more, when all the time I am thinking how pitiful and white he looks, lying back on his pillows. I am telling you exactly how things are because I would want you to tell me if I were in your place and you in mine. I can understand how hard it is for you to be so far away where you can't see for yourself how he is, every hour. I'll try to send a note or postal each day.

" ' He's talked about you a lot, lately. Says you have the pioneer spirit of all our old Colonial grandmothers, to stick to your post the way you are doing for our sakes. He's constantly referring to things that happened at the Wigwam, and to the people who used to come there, — Mr. Ellested and the Lees and Phil, — especially Phil. I wish he could drop in here to see us daily as he used to do in Arizona. Maybe Jack would rouse up and take some interest in *him*. He doesn't take any now in the people we have met here, although no one could be kinder than the Rochesters and the Barnabys have been to us.' "

Joyce finished reading, and Phil rose to his feet and began pacing up and down the long room, his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the floor as if he were considering some weighty prob-

MARY WARE IN TEXAS.

Leaning against the mantel
looked down at her thoughtfully.

lem. Finally he stopped, and leaning against the mantel, looked down at her, thoughtfully, saying, "Joyce, I've about thought out a way to manage it — to take in Bauer on my way to California, I mean. You told me once that Aunt Emily calls me her 'other boy.' Well, you all are my other family, and these glimpses you've given me of it make me homesick to see them. I might be able to help matters some way. I'm almost sure I can arrange to start several days before the rest of the party and go around that way, so if you have any messages or things to send, get them ready."

"Oh, Phil!" she cried, thankfully. "They'll be so glad — I know it will do them a world of good to see you. Maybe you can cheer Jack up a bit. So much depends on keeping him hopeful." Then she added, wistfully, "I only wish you could put me in your pocket and take me along."

"I wish I could," he answered, cordially. Then more cordially still after a moment's thought, "Why, that's the very thing! Come and go along! Just cut loose for a short visit and let things here go hang! It would mean more to them at home to see you again than the few dollars you could pile up if you stayed on here."

"No," she contradicted, sadly, the light dying

out of her eyes, which had brightened at the mere thought of such a visit. "It's too long a trip and too expensive, and — "

"But we can easily arrange all that," he interrupted, eagerly. "Under the circumstances you ought to let me do for Jack's sister what Jack would gladly do for mine were the circumstances reversed. *Please,* Joyce."

She shook her head as he urged his plan, but her eyes filled with tears and she said, brokenly, "You are a dear, generous boy to offer it, and I'll remember it always, but Phil — don't you see — there's too much at stake. I *can't* leave now. Not only my work in hand would stop, but I'd lose the orders that are constantly coming in, and I can't afford to miss a penny that would add to Jack's comfort in any way. He may be helpless for years and years, and Mary's salary will stop as soon as the Mallorys leave Bauer this summer."

"Well, think about it, anyway," urged Phil, hopefully. "Maybe you'll see things differently by daylight, and change your mind. I'll ring you up in the morning."

"By the way," he said, a few minutes later, when he was slipping into his overcoat, "don't

write to Mary that there is a possibility of my going to Bauer. If I should go I want to surprise her."

"Very well," agreed Joyce. "But I may write about Elsie's wedding and say that you'll all be going West?"

"Oh, yes, she'll probably have cards herself soon, for Elsie has never forgotten her one encounter with the little Vicar, and she wrote for her address some time ago."

It was several days before Joyce saw Phil again. When he did come he was in such a hurry that he did not wait for the elevator, which seemed to be stuck somewhere in the basement. After several impatient rings he started up the stairs, two steps at a time, and had reached the fifth floor before the elevator overtook him. He was slightly out of breath, but so intent on his errand that he never would have thought to step in and ride the rest of the way, had it not stopped on the landing for another passenger, as he was about to pass the cage.

The janitor was cleaning the halls of the top floor apartments, and the door into Joyce's studio being open, Phil walked in without waiting to ring. Joyce was at her easel hard at work. Her

face lighted up when she saw his, for it showed so plainly he was the bearer of good news.

"Daddy's going with me," were his first breathless words of greeting. "We — " Then he paused as if some sudden recollection warned him to ask, "What have you heard from home lately?"

She thought the question was prompted by his fear that it might not be convenient for them to have guests in the house if Jack were so ill, so she hastened to reassure him.

"Oh, I had the cheerfulest sort of letter from Mamma this morning, written last Sunday, the very day I was crying my eyes out over them. Isn't that always the way? Here it was so bleak and blustery that I couldn't help imagining that they were as dismal as I. And all the time it was as warm as summer in Bauer, the country a mass of wildflowers, and they were having a perfectly delightful time with Gay Melville. And guess who had gone up with her to spend the day there! Alex Shelby of Kentucky!" she added, without an instant's pause for him to answer.

"Mamma wrote that she didn't know when she had had such an enjoyable day. Dr. Shelby insisted on her going for a little outing with the girls while he and Norman took care of Jack. Mary poled

them up to Fern-bank in the boat, and when they got back they found that, in some unaccountable way, Jack had been wonderfully cheered up. He seemed more like himself than he had been for weeks. Mamma was so happy over that, for even if he can never be any better physically it is a lot to be thankful for to have his spirits kept up."

"Is that all?" asked Phil, when she paused at last.

"Yes. Why? Isn't that *enough?*"

"I only wanted to find out how much you knew before I broke *my* news. Now, listen to this! Alex Shelby wrote to Daddy that same night. You know they met at Eugenia's wedding, and Shelby, who was just beginning to practise medicine then seemed to develop a case of hero-worship for father. Shelby has taken a great interest in Jack's case ever since he heard of the accident, and the reason he sent Aunt Emily out that afternoon was that he might have a chance to examine Jack without her knowing it. He didn't want to raise anybody's hopes if nothing can be done. He thinks that the first operation did not go quite far enough. There is still a pressure on the spinal cord which may be removed by a very delicate bit of surgery. *I* don't understand his technical terms, but it's one

of the most difficult things known to the medical profession.

"Daddy says there are very few cases on record of its having been done successfully, although it has been attempted several times. Personally he knows of two cases. One was a football player in this country who had his back broken, and one was a man in Germany who was injured in exactly the same vertebræ where Jack's trouble lies. And — mark this now — *Daddy helped with that operation.* The surgeon who performed it was a friend of his, and called him in because it was such a rare and peculiar case."

Joyce was scarcely breathing now, as she listened. She was white to the lips in her intense excitement.

"Oh, go *on!*" she exclaimed, unable to endure the suspense when he paused. "Doctor Tremont thinks he can cure him?"

"No —" was the guarded response. "He is not sure. He doesn't say that. But there is a chance, just one chance, and he is going to take it. We're leaving in a few hours, so I haven't another moment to stay!"

Joyce, who had risen in her first excitement, dropped back on her stool again, limp and trem-

bling. She had thought so long of Jack's illness as being hopeless that the possibility of a cure almost unnerved her with the great joy of it. Phil went on, rapidly:

"Shelby told Jack of his hope, but evidently he said nothing to the rest of the family, or they would have known the reason for Jack's return to cheerfulness. Now, don't go to getting upset like that," he added, holding out his hands for a cordial leave-taking. "I don't want to get your hopes up too high, but I've always felt that Daddy could come as near to working miracles as anyone living, and you just remember this — he's going to work one this time, if mortal man can do it! You see, he knows what the Wares were to me that year on the desert. He hasn't forgotten how you all saved his motherless boy for him. That's the way he puts it. Saved me from my besetting temptation and sent me away to make a man of myself. If he can put Jack on his feet again he will feel that he is only paying back a small part of his obligation to you all — to say nothing of *my* debt. Lord! I can't even talk about that now! It's too big for me ever to tackle myself. But I just wanted you to know how we both feel about it —"

He did not attempt to finish, but with a final

strong handclasp he was gone before Joyce could find her voice for more than a faltering good-by.

For a little while after he left she sat before her easel, gazing vacantly at the canvas with eyes which saw nothing. She could not settle down to work again with so many exciting mental pictures rising up before her: Jack, undergoing the operation at home. The awful suspense and tension of that time of waiting until they could know the result, and then — Jack, strong and well and swinging along with the vigorous stride she remembered so well. Or would it be — She shut her eyes and shuddered, putting away from her with an exclamation of horror the other scene that persisted in presenting itself. She had never forgotten the tramp of feet across the threshold of the little brown house in Plainsville the day they carried her father away.

Presently she could bear it no longer, and pushing back her easel she slipped off her apron and called to Mrs. Boyd that she was going out for awhile. In her present tremor of nervousness she could not trust herself to stop and explain. She felt that she could not bear to listen to the little woman's platitudes, no matter how sympathetic they might be.

It was not till she was on the car, half-way out to

Central Park, that she remembered she had not told Phil of one other item of news in her mother's letter. She wondered if he knew that Gay and Alex Shelby were engaged. The reason that they had gone to Bauer was to announce it themselves to the only people in that part of the world who knew and loved Lloydsboro Valley. It was in that happy valley that their romance had begun, and they both knew that Mrs. Ware had spent her girlhood there, that Mary regarded it as her "Promised Land," and that Jack, although his visit there had been limited to one day, had seen the rose-covered cabin where Gay and her Knight of the Looking-glass had first caught sight of each other, and where their married life was to begin.

It was several hours before Joyce got back to the studio. The long car-ride and the brisk walk in the park had helped her to regain her usual outward composure, but she was far from being as calm as she seemed. Alternate moods of hopefulness and foreboding kept her swinging like a pendulum from exhilaration to a sickening sense of fear. She could hardly fix her mind on her work, although her hands moved feverishly.

Before starting back to work she hunted up one of Henrietta's railroad time-tables, and fastened it

to a corner of her canvas, so that she could follow the course of the Texas-bound travellers. At intervals she glanced from the clock to the card, thinking, "Now they are just leaving the New York station," or, "Now they are pulling into Washington." Later she found the time when they would be going aboard the New Orleans sleeper, and from then on a thousand times her thoughts ran on ahead to picture their reception in Bauer, and the events that would follow there in quick succession. Her waking hours were filled with only one thought till Phil's first telegram announced their arrival. Then she scarcely ate or slept, so great was her anxiety as she waited his second message.

As Doctor Tremont and Phil pushed through the crowds at the New York station, hurrying to reach the Washington-bound train, steaming on the track, Phil recalled the last time he had passed through. It was in March of the previous year, but later in the month, that he had come down with Joyce to put Mary and Betty aboard the train, the morning after they had heard about Jack's accident. It was at that stand that he bought the fruit for them, here he had snatched up the magazines, and there was where he had stood while the train pulled out, waiting for the last glimpse of the little Vicar's face at the window,

bravely smiling in her efforts to "keep inflexible" for Joyce's sake.

The scene had been impressed vividly upon his memory, because of the way the whole affair had touched his sympathies, and now he found himself, after a year, recalling things that at the time he had barely noticed. It was like taking a second look at a snapshot picture, and finding details in the background to which he had paid no attention when first focussing the camera. There was that wistful look in Betty's brown eyes, for instance. They had been almost as full of trouble as Mary's. Their appealing sadness came back to him now quite as forcibly as Mary's tearful good-by smile.

He remembered the protecting way she had put her arm around her little pupil. They had been such good comrades all through the vacation pleasures which they had shared, that Christmas and Easter. He remembered now how far back Betty's friendship with Joyce dated. Suddenly it occurred to him that Betty, of all people, would be most interested in what was about to occur in the Ware family. Whatever followed the operation, whether it were grief or joy, she would share with them.

Doctor Tremont had some business to attend to which would keep him busy during the few

hours they were obliged to stop over in Washington, and, after a few moments' deliberation, Phil decided to go out to Warwick Hall while he waited, instead of spending his time looking up an old acquaintance, as he had intended doing.

There was another reason for calling on Betty, which he did not acknowledge to himself as a reason, but it carried weight in helping him to make a decision. That was the knowledge that she would have the latest news of Lloyd Sherman. He had had six months in which to grow accustomed to the idea that the little unset turquoise he had once given her could never stand for anything more between them than the " true-blue friendship stone." He had been so determined to make it more, that his whole world seemed jolted out of its orbit when he heard of her engagement to Rob Moore. He could not talk of it at first. Lately, however, he had come to take a more philosophical view of the situation.

Several hours later, when Phil found himself in front of Warwick Hall, the great castle-like building and beautifully kept grounds seemed as familiar as if he had visited it before. The Lloydsboro valley girls had sung its praises ever since he had known them. Lloyd herself had talked much of it

in the days when every subject she mentioned was interesting, simply because she chose to talk about it. Mary Ware had pictured it to him as a veritable paradise, and he had been pressed to admire so many photographs of it on so many occasions that it was no wonder it had a familiar look, every way he turned.

He would have been highly amused could he have known what a sensation he was creating in the school, as he stood on the highest terrace, looking down the flight of stately marble steps that led to the river. In the first place, the sight of such an unusually attractive man, young, handsome, and with an air of distinction, was a rarity in those parts. That he should loiter down the walk instead of striding straight up to the massive portal, aroused the curiosity of every girl who happened to be near a window, and why he should pluck a leaf from the Abbotsford ivy, overhanging the pergola, and then walk along the hedge of the wonderful old garden until he could lean over and read the motto on the ancient sun-dial, was more than any of them could fathom. There was a flutter among those who had seen him, when presently the great knocker, echoing through the hall, announced that he was ready to enter.

The pompous butler opened the door, and for the second time in his history nearly fell backward, for the dignified young stranger who stood there with the easy grace of at least a viscount, called out as if he had known him always, "Oh, it's Hawkins."

When Phil raised his hand to the knocker he was smiling over Mary's account of her first entrance through that door. He had teased her unmercifully when he heard of her rehearsals for the purpose of impressing the butler, and when the man instantly appeared just as Mary had pictured him, he was so much like a stiff old portrait bowing from the frame of the doorway, that the exclamation slipped from Phil in surprise. Then he smiled again, thinking how inadvertently he had copied Mary.

At first glance Hawkins thought he must be one of Madam Chartley's relatives from England, and bowed again, obsequiously this time. But the card laid on his silver tray was not for Madam. It was for Miss Elizabeth Lewis, the youngest and most popular teacher in the Hall.

It was after recitation hours and Betty was not in her room, but she came in presently from a walk, looking as girlish and rosy as the little fresh-

man who had been her companion. The March winds had given her color, and blown her brown hair about her face in soft little curls. Phil could see her through the curtained arch as she came into the hall and took the card Hawkins presented on his tray. Her face lighted up with pleasure, and she gave an exclamation of surprise, both of which items Hawkins noticed. When she hurried into the reception-room he cast a look of discreet curiosity after her. Then he turned away with a wise wag of the head. Of course, one knew what to expect when the young stranger called her by her first name in such a joyful tone as that, and she responded cordially that it was such a lovely surprise to see "the Best Man!"

All the wedding party had called Phil the Best Man, ever since Mary had emphasized the name by her comically reverent use of it, and it seemed quite natural that the next remark should be about her. Phil thought to surprise Betty by saying, casually, "I've just stopped by to ask if you want to send any message to Mary Ware. I'm on my own way to Bauer now."

But he was the one to be surprised, for her face paled and she exclaimed, in a voice tense with suppressed excitement, "Oh, is your father going,

too? Has he really consented to attempt the operation?"

Then, in answer to his exclamation of astonishment that she should know anything about it, she explained, while the color returned in a rush. She had had a note from Jack that morning, just a scribbled line, telling what Alex Shelby had written to Doctor Tremont, and what they hoped would be the answer.

"He hasn't told the family yet," she explained, seeing from Phil's face that he thought it queer she should know of it. "He didn't want them to suffer the cruel disappointment it would be should they discover they had been cherishing a false hope. But he just *had* to tell somebody, and he knew I'd understand how much recovery would mean to him, for he used to write me so fully of his plans and ambitions before he was hurt."

She closed her hands so tightly that the pink nails pressed into the tender palms. "Oh, I *hope* Alex hasn't been mistaken," she exclaimed. "I can't think of anything so cruel as to hold out the heaven of such a hope to him, only to have it dashed away."

"Daddy says there is one chance," answered Phil, "and he is going to take it." Then, with

a sudden understanding of the situation as he watched her face, he began to comfort her with the same words he had spoken to Joyce. "Daddy can come as near to working miracles as any man living, and you just remember this, little girl. He's going to work one this time if mortal man can do it!"

The ring of certainty in his voice made her look up at him with a smile that was like an April day, such joy shone through the brown eyes, which a moment before had been misty with tears. She did not know how much she had revealed, but as she turned away Phil said to himself, "So *that's* the way the land lies! I must give Daddy a hint of how much is at stake. If he saves Jack it won't be for the Ware family alone."

Betty had been called aside a moment to speak to a visiting parent, and when she came back to Phil, had fully recovered her composure.

"Come on," she said, gaily. "There are a few things I must show you. It will never do for anybody to confess to Mary Ware that he has been to Warwick Hall and missed seeing the things that she particularly adores."

It was a short pilgrimage she led him on; to meet Madam Chartley first, then to see the great

stained-glass window where the motto of Edryn, "I keep tryste," flaunted itself in letters of light above the ruby heart and the mailed hand, clasping the spear. Then outdoors they went, past the peacocks on the terraces, down the marble steps to the river, where pretty girls were walking arm in arm, and Phil was conscious of many curious glances cast in his direction. Then they strolled through the garden, where the crocuses and early March flowers were making a brave showing, and out towards the golf links a little way. Betty's cheeks were almost as red as the bright Tam O'Shanter cap she wore, and her eyes shone with a happy, tender light as she talked of Mary and what the school had meant to her. The pilgrimage, like the bundle of letters which Joyce had read, was eloquent with suggestions of Mary at every turn. He understood now as he had not before how much she had renounced when she left without finishing the year. He began to appreciate the greatness of her sacrifice, and, guided by Betty at his elbow, he began to perceive what an influence such a place, with its ideals and its refined, old-world fashion of living might exert on a girl like Mary Ware.

There was not much opportunity to lead the

conversation towards Lloyd, with Betty constantly breaking off to say, "Oh, don't forget to mention this to Mary," or, "Tell her you saw this and that." He learned very little about her, save that she was well and happy. Betty had always known, she said, that Rob was the one written in the stars for the Princess Winsome. They knew each other so thoroughly and had such a happy childhood in common, and in her opinion they had always been meant for each other from the beginning.

It was growing late when they came back to the front door, but Betty insisted on his coming in for a moment for a cup of tea, "Served from an ancestral teacup," she insisted, "so that you can brag to Mary of it." While they waited for it to be brought, Betty hastily summoned several of the girls whom she wanted him to meet.

"You'll never remember their names," she said, laughingly, "and Mary will make your life a burden with questions if you can't answer. Give me a pencil and I'll scribble them down for you. Elise Walton, you'll remember, of course, for she was the pretty child with the long, dark curls, whom you used to meet so many times at The Beeches, the summer Eugenia was married. You'll

quite fall in love with her, I am sure, for she is getting prettier every day, and you'll not need any memorandum to keep her in mind when you've once heard her talk. A. O. Miggs will be the little roly-poly dumpling of a girl, and Dorene Derwent, the one who giggles so gurglingly. Cornie Dean you'll remember for the elaborate way she does her hair, and the coy way she has of casting melting side-glances. That's a habit she has acquired just in this last year, so you might mention it to Mary. She'll be immensely interested in hearing it. See, I have made marginal notes for each one, if you can understand my abbreviations."

As she handed him the slip of paper the girls came in, all pleased to meet "such a fascinating, Lord-Lochinvar looking man," as A. O. described him afterward, and all overjoyed to find that he would be the bearer of messages to Mary Ware. They sent so many that he laughingly disclaimed all responsibility in case he should get them mixed in transit. He had an odd feeling that he was on exhibition to these girls as Mary's friend, and that he must do her credit. The few moments he stayed with them he used to such advantage that he was straightway written down in their opinion as the most fascinating man they had ever met.

When he took his leave it was with a flattering regret that made each girl feel that she was the one who inspired it, and they went back to their rooms to compare notes and to "rave over him," as Dorene expressed it, for days.

The twilight was falling when he started back to the station. Betty walked part of the way with him. Only once they referred to Jack again, and that was not till they reached the bend in the driveway, where Betty turned back. She put out her hand with wishes for a safe journey, and he held it an instant to say, "I'm sure it's all going to end happily, and you shall have the first telegram."

CHAPTER XII

IN "BLUE-BONNET" TIME

THE time of "blue-bonnets" had come. No matter where else in Texas the lupin may grow, one thing is certain; there is enough of it in the meadows around Bauer nearly every spring to justify its choice as the State flower. This particular March, acres and acres of it, blue as the Mediterranean, stretched away on either side of the high-roads. Viewed from a distance when the wind, blowing across it, made waves of bloom, it almost seemed as if a wide blue sea were rolling in across the land.

From his bed near the window Jack Ware could catch a glimpse of one of these meadows, where the cattle stood buried up to their bodies in the fragrant blossoms. Now and then the breeze, fluttering his curtains, brought the odor to him almost as heavy and sweet as the smell of locusts. He watched the picture with languid eyes which closed weakly at intervals. They were shut when Mary tiptoed into the room, to see if there was anything

she could do for his comfort before starting out on her usual afternoon excursion with her pupils, but they opened with an expression of greater interest than they had held for some days as he saw her standing there in a freshly laundered gingham. It was so blue and white that she suggested a blooming blue-bonnet herself.

"Hullo, Finnigan," he said, with an attempt at his old-time pleasantry. "'Off agin, gone agin,' are you? Which way this time?"

Touched almost to tears by this evidence of returning interest, Mary explained eagerly that they were still studying about bees. She had found a bee-tree in the Herdt pasture, and the lupin was all a-buzz with specimens to illustrate the lesson. That was for the Wisdom part of it. For the Strength there were some new exercises in climbing and hanging from a low limb. The practical application of their Courtesy lesson would be the gathering of a great basketful of blue-bonnets for the ladies of the Guild, who wanted to decorate the parish house with them for an entertainment to be given there.

"Oh, they're making long strides," she assured him. "Mrs. Mallory told me that the time it rained so hard last week, and I couldn't get across

the foot-bridge at the ford to give them their usual lesson, Brud sat down at bedtime and howled, because he said he'd have to 'count that day lost.' The sun was down and he hadn't 'any worvey action done.' It took the combined wits of the family to think of some worthy action he could do at that late hour, and he finally went to bed happy. So you see my labor hasn't been *all* in vain."

There was a faint gleam of amusement in Jack's eyes, but seeing that she was about to leave him, he turned the subject by motioning toward the table beside his bed, where Elsie Tremont's wedding invitations lay.

"Mary," he said, slowly, "would you be surprised if Phil were to come by Bauer on his way to California?"

To her vehement avowal that such a happening would certainly surprise her out of a year's growth, at least, he answered:

"Well, I am a good deal more than half-way looking for him. 'I feel it in my bones' that he is coming, and coming very soon."

"Oh, Jack!" she cried in distress. "Don't look for him. Don't set your heart on seeing him! I couldn't bear for you to be disappointed."

"Don't you worry about that," he answered, soothingly. "You run along and pick your blue-bonnets, and if Phil *should* happen to come walking down the road towards you one of these days, remember the feeling in my bones warned you. The poor old things have been so full of aches and pains that you might allow them one pleasant sensation at least."

"But, Jack," she began again, a wrinkle of distress deepening between her eyes. "If he shouldn't come you'd be so awfully disappointed!"

Jack's thin hand waved both her and her objections aside.

"Hike along," he insisted, cheerfully, "I merely said *if!*"

Considerably worried by what she thought was a groundless hope of Jack's, Mary started out of the gate. His suggestion seemed to change the entire landscape, and instead of seeing it as it had grown to look to her accustomed eyes, she saw it as she imagined it would appear to Phil; the cottage she was leaving behind her, the wide blue lupin meadows ahead, the white of the wild plum blossoms mingled with the glowing branches of the red-bud trees, in every lane and stretch of woodland.

With her old childish propensity for day-dreaming unabated, she made pictures for herself as she walked along towards the foot-bridge. Suppose he really would come, and she, by some intuition of his approach, could divine the day and hour. She would like to be all in white when he met her, emerging from the edge of the woods with her arms heaped up with snowy masses of wild plum blossoms, and a spray of red-bud in her hair. Or, maybe, it would be more picturesque for her to be standing in the boat, poling slowly towards the landing, a cargo of wild flowers at her feet like a picture of the Spirit of Spring.

Here she broke off from her musings, saying, half aloud, "But as sure as I posed to look like a Spring goddess I'd be looking like a young goose. It doesn't pay for me to plan impressive entrances and meetings; they always turn out with my looking perfectly ridiculous."

She had reached the first turn in the road by this time, and, stooping to tie her shoe, suddenly became aware of the fact that her hands were empty. She had started off without the alarm-clock and the magnifying glass which she always carried on these trips. In addition she had intended to bring a large market-basket to-day, in which to

put the flowers. The basket, with the clock and glass inside, was in her hand before she started. She remembered she had set it down for a moment on the front step while she went back into Jack's room, and it was what he said about Phil's coming that made her go off without it. There was no time to lose, so she started back, running all the way.

Snatching up the basket from the step where she found it still undisturbed, she was starting off again, when a little bird-like cry stopped her. It was like the softest notes of a mocking-bird.

"That provoking little wildcat is out of her cage again!" she exclaimed, stopping to look all around. "Here, Matilda, kitty, kitty, where are you?"

In response to her call, what seemed to be the gentlest of house-kittens came bounding through the grass. Thinking it would be less trouble to take it along than to carry it back to its cage in the woodshed when she was in such a great hurry, Mary caught it up in her arms, and once more started down the road, one hand slipped through the handle of the basket. It snuggled down against her shoulder, purring loudly.

"You ridiculous little atom!" laughed Mary.

"I wonder what the girls at Warwick Hall would say if they could see me going along carrying a live *wildcat*. That will be something wild and Texasy for me to put in my next letters. I needn't say that it weighs only twenty ounces, and that if it wasn't for its bow legs and funny little bobbed tail and spotted stomach one would think it was just a tame, ordinary, domestic pussy. But you'll be savage enough by and bye, won't you? When the tassels grow on your ear-tips and your whiskers spread out wide and your spots get big and tigery!"

Two soft paws reached up to tap her face, and she gave the furry ball in her arms an affectionate squeeze. She had never cared especially for kittens, but this little wild one with its coquettish ways had wonderfully ingratiated itself into her affections in the week she had owned it. Mrs. Barnaby had brought it in from the ranch. Cousin Sammy had found eight of them in the woods after Pedro had killed the old mother cat, caught in the act of carrying off one of the turkeys. This was the only one that lived. Mrs. Barnaby could not keep it, because, tiny as it was, it toddled around after the chickens and put even the big Plymouth Rock hens to flight. So she brought it in to Mary, and Mary, feeling particularly forlorn that day, wel-

comed the little orphan, because its lonely state gave them a bond in common.

The day it came happened to be her eighteenth birthday, with nothing to mark it as a gala occasion except a handkerchief from her mother and a string of trout from Norman. He had gone out before daylight to catch them for her breakfast. Joyce's present did not arrive until the next day, and the round-robin letter from Warwick Hall was nearly a week late. Not until after the sorority was seated at its annual St. Patrick's Day dinner, did they recall the double celebration they had had the year before. The letter was written then and there, passing around the table with the bonbons, that each one present might add a birthday greeting. Then Dorene, to whom it was entrusted, forgot to post it for several days. It was a joy when it did come, but the anniversary itself, before the letter reached her, was a disappointing day.

She had always looked forward to her eighteenth birthday as being one of the most important milestones of her life; not so important, of course, as one's graduation or début or wedding, but still a day that should be made memorable by something unusually nice. Years ago Jack had promised her

a watch on her eighteenth birthday, a little chatelaine watch with a mother-of-pearl case, like the one the old Colonel had given to Lloyd. But when the time came Jack did not even know that it was her birthday. He never looked at the calendar since their weary, monotonous days had grown to be all alike. She did not show him the handkerchief or tell him that the delicious fish which they had for breakfast was in honor of any especial occasion. In no way did she refer to its being the seventeenth of March.

She ironed all morning and took the children out in the afternoon, as usual, and nothing made the day different from an ordinary one, only that she felt very old and grown up, and thought now and then a little pityingly of her early expectations and the way they had turned out. In a vague sort of way she was sorry for herself, till Mrs. Barnaby came in with the baby wildcat, which she jokingly offered as a St. Patrick's day greeting.

Mary immediately named it Matilda, for Mrs. Barnaby, and for the civilizing effect such a tame, gentle sort of name ought to have on a wild creature. In watching it and laughing over its playful antics she forgot to feel middle-aged and sorry for herself.

As long as someone could keep an eye on it to prevent its straying away after any animal that passed the house, it could be allowed the liberty of the place, but whenever Mary went off for a long time it had to be fastened in its cage. This was the first time she had taken it with her for an afternoon's outing, and as she hurried down the road with it in her arms, the knowledge of what she was carrying gave her the first feeling of adventure that she had had since coming to Texas. "It's all been as tame as an old Tabby and a teapot," she thought. She had pictured Texas as a land of cowboys and round-ups and thrilling frontier experiences. She had found only the commonplace and conventional, so that there was a source of satisfaction in the fact that, at last, she had captured something untamed and savage.

As she reached the foot-bridge a party on horseback came down the opposite bank to cross the ford. She recognized the young fellow in the lead as a boy from the East who had been staying at the Williams House several months. Evidently he also had expected to find Texas a land of adventure. Soon after his arrival he appeared in the quiet streets of Bauer attired like the cowboy of a Wild West show. That he was a tenderfoot was

amusingly apparent to the natives. Everything proclaimed it, from his awkward seat in his creaking new saddle to the new rope coiled around the horn of it. He could have no more use for a lariat than for a tomahawk, but he never rode without it. He had his picture taken in full paraphernalia, from his spurs to the rattlesnake skin band on his rakish sombrero, to send back home to show what a sport he had become; and his cup of satisfaction brimmed over when a still more recent tenderfoot took a snapshot of him, evidently considering him the "real thing."

He had three Eastern girls with him this morning, whom he was trying to impress with stories of his recklessness and prowess, and of the dangers one daily encountered in a new country. He had met Norman and he knew Mary by sight, and had heard of her odd pet. As they approached her he said, in a tone which she could not fail to hear, although he lowered his voice:

"There's mighty little out here that *is* tame. Lots of people keep foxes running around their premises instead of rat-terriers, and when they can get a wildcat they always prefer them to tame mousers."

"Now, Dexter, stop stuffing us," one of the

girls exclaimed. "I don't believe a word of it!"

"It's the truth," he insisted. "That very young lady over yonder on the foot-bridge could tell you so. That isn't a kitten she is carrying. It is a young wildcat."

The next instant the girl was splashing through the water across to Mary, calling, "Excuse me, but *is* that a wildcat? I can't believe it!"

Mary had heard the conversation, and her face dimpled with amusement as she held Matilda up to view, saying, "Certainly. See how beautifully she is marked." She pointed out the various signs which proved her claim.

The girl gave a little shriek. "For mercy sakes!" she exclaimed. "Suppose it should get loose! What a dreadful country! Aren't you afraid?"

Assured that Mary was not in the least afraid, she dashed up the bank after her laughing escort, who thereafter had no trouble in convincing her that his most daring tales were true, since Matilda had proved the truth of his first one.

Mary looked after them almost enviously. When she first came to Bauer she had had faint hopes of sometime being able to join a riding party like

that. She had seen girls going by often from the hotel, and had told herself that, before the winter was over, she intended to find some way to earn enough to hire a horse one afternoon of every week. And that time when she visited Gay, and Roberta talked of saddles while she combed Mary's hair, Roberta had said that she would ride up to Bauer sometime after Christmas; all her "crowd" would go, and they would stay several days at the Williams House, and Mary was to show them the country.

Gay had promised several visits, and Mary had looked forward to them more eagerly than she knew, till word came soon after New Year that the Bauer trips would have to be postponed indefinitely. Roberta had gone to the coast for the rest of the winter, and Gay expected to spend several months with her sister Lucy, Mrs. Jameson Harcourt, in Florida.

It seemed to Mary that there had been disappointment for her in her Texas winter every way she turned. True, Gay was home now, and they had had two pleasant days with her, once when she and Alex Shelby came up to announce their engagement, and cheered Jack up so wonderfully. But Gay wasn't interested in horseback riding with

"the crowd" any longer. Besides, the Ware fortunes had taken such a turn that the money she had succeeded in earning had to go for more necessary things than saddles and horse-hire and a pretty habit.

As Mary glanced after the departing cavalcade once more the sight of them suggested a new picture that appealed to her as an interesting way to meet Phil in case he should come. It would be so picturesque to be galloping down the road on a mettlesome black horse in a pretty white riding habit like those girls were wearing. White, with a scarlet four-in-hand and a soft fold of scarlet silk around the crown of her wide-brimmed white hat. Phil had been such a dashing horseman himself, and had owned such a beautiful animal when they were out on the desert, that maybe he would be more interested in an approach made that way, than one in a boat with a cargo of wild flowers. She walked along slowly, considering the question, till Brud and Sister hailed her.

Meanwhile Jack was saying to his mother that it wouldn't have been fair to the kid to let her get away without some inkling of the truth.

"She'd have been terribly upset if I'd have told her that they are due here this afternoon, and

she'd have been equally upset if they had walked in on her without any warning. But the hint I gave her will start her to thinking about them, so she will not be altogether surprised when she sees them."

He had waited until Mary left the house before breaking the news to his mother that he expected Alex Shelby to come sometime during the afternoon, bringing Doctor Tremont and Phil. But even then he did not mention the faint hope which had buoyed him up night and day since Alex's first visit. He had faith in the young physician's ability, but not until the older one confirmed his opinion would he allow himself to share that hope with any one else, lest it prove without foundation.

With his eyes on the clock he lay counting the minutes until their arrival. He was deliberately forcing himself to be calm; to take slow, even breaths, to think of everything under the sun save the one thing which set his pulses to beating wildly and sent a thrill like fire tingling through him. He lay there like a prisoner in his dungeon who hears footsteps and new voices approaching. They might mean that deliverance is at hand, or they might pass on, leaving him to the blackness and

despair of his dungeon for the rest of his life. In a like agony of apprehension he watched the pendulum swing back and forth, and listened to the slow tick! tock! till his suspense grew almost unendurable.

One hand clasped and unclasped a corner of the counterpane in a paroxysm of nervousness. He lay with his face turned away from his mother, and she, busy with her endless sewing over by the side window, did not guess what great effort he was making to retain his outward composure. She saw his eyes fixed on the clock, however, when she rose to get a spool that had rolled away, and feeling his restrained restlessness she tried to think of something to talk about which would make him forget how slowly time was passing. Subjects of that kind are rare, when two people have been constantly shut in together for a year, and while she considered, a long silence fell between them. It was broken by a demand, almost querulous, from Jack; the same cry that had aroused her in the night, when he was a little boy, suddenly awakening from a scary dream.

"Sing to me, mother!"

It had been years since she had heard that cry, and the long form stretched out under the white

covers bore small resemblance to the little one that had summoned her then, but she answered in the same soothing way:

"All right, little son, what shall I sing?"

She smiled as the same tremulous answer came now as it had then.

"Why, sing *my* song! Of course!"

She did not rise as had been her custom, to go to his bedside and hold his hand while she lulled him back to sleep with her low humming, and the blessed consciousness of her nearness. He was a grown man now, and it was broad daylight. But instinctively she felt his need was greater than it had ever been, and her voice took on its tenderest soothing quality as she began to croon the old hymn that had always been his chosen lullaby, when he was tucked to sleep in a little crib bed. "Pilgrims of the Night," she sang:

"'Hark, hark, my soul! Angelic songs are swelling,
O'er earth's green fields and ocean's wave-beat shore.'"

Glancing across, she saw his drawn face relax a trifle, and he snuggled his thin cheek contentedly against the pillow. High and sweet her voice rose tremulously:

"'Angels of light,
Singing to welcome the pilgrims of the night.'"

The song had many associations for them both. What he was thinking about she could not guess, but when she began the third verse:

"'Far, far away like bells at evening pealing,'"

her own thoughts were back in that time when she rocked in her arms the dearest little son that ever cuddled against a mother's shoulder. She was recalling time after time when she had held him so, telling him good-night stories, listening to his funny little questions and baby confidences, and kissing the dimpled fingers clasped in her own when he knelt to lisp his evening prayer.

He had always been a comfort to her, even in the boisterous outbreaking days that are the most trying in a boy's growing-up time. There had never been a noisier boy, or one who threw himself into his play with more headlong vigor, but, in a flash, scene after scene passed through her mind, showing him both at work and play as she had prayed he might be, strong and manly and clean and absolutely fearless either of fists or opinions. Then she thought of his touching consideration of her when he tried "to take father's place behind the plow." He had been a tower of strength to her from that day on. What a future she had dreamed for him, and now in the high tide of

his young manhood, when he should have years of conquest and achievement ahead of him, here he was a helpless cripple!

"Rest comes at last, though life be long and dreary,
The day must dawn, and darksome night be passed."

Her voice faltered almost to breaking now, as she sang on, rebelling at the thought that his life which promised so fair, should have been made long and dreary, changed so hopelessly and so suddenly into darksome night. It seemed so cruel, she thought, with a tightening of the throat which made it almost impossible to finish the song. But supposing from the peaceful expression of Jack's face that he was falling asleep, she sang bravely on to the end, although the tears were dropping down on the seam in her now idle hands.

"Angels sing on, your faithful watches keeping,
Sing us sweet fragments of the song above,
Till morning's joy shall end the night of weeping,
And life's long shadows break in cloudless love.
Angels of Jesus,
Angels of light,
Singing to welcome
The pilgrims of the night."

Looking across as the last note died away, she thought he was asleep, and rose to draw down the window-shade. But as she tiptoed past him he

opened his eyes and held out his hand to draw her to him.

"Little mother," he said with a wistful smile that made her bend hastily over him and kiss his forehead to hide the trembling of her lips. "I'd like you to know in case anything should happen — sooner than we expect — that that's the way I think of death. It's a going out into the dark — but it's only going as a 'Pilgrim of the night.' I don't mind it. It'll not be lonesome. They'll be singing to welcome me."

In answer to her cry, "Oh, Jack! Don't!" he drew her cheek down against his, and as he felt it wet with tears he said, lightly:

"Why, mother mine, that's nothing to cry about. I've always looked forward in a way to that ever since I can remember. That song always brings up the most comforting picture to me — a procession of friendly white angels coming down the dark road to meet a frightened little boy and lead him home!"

She held him close a moment, not finding words wherewith to answer him, but feeling that he understood all that was left unspoken in her heart. She wanted to hold him thus, always, so tightly that he could not slip away on that pilgrimage he

faced so confidently, that pilgrimage from which he could never return to her.

While she clung to him thus, a noise outside brought them back to the things of earth. An automobile, speeding up the road, had stopped at the gate. Mrs. Ware glanced out hastily. As she saw the three men striding up the path her first thought was one of housewifely dismay. She wondered how she could stretch the simple supper she had planned for that evening, into enough for these unexpected guests. If Jack had only given her a little longer notice —

But that thought was immediately thrust aside in her pleasure at seeing Phil again. It was the first time since the day she bade him good-bye in the little wigwam sitting-room, and sent him out with her Godspeed to make a man of himself. His waywardness had given her a motherly interest in him, and now, her quick glance showed that he had not disappointed her, that he had kept every promise. She welcomed him with a welcome that made him feel that this was a real home-coming, so that he called out to the distinguished-looking, gray-haired old doctor just behind him, "Now, Daddy, you see for yourself how it was!"

Mrs. Ware ushered them at once into Jack's

room. She knew he was waiting impatiently to see them, but did not dream how much was at stake. It was nearly half an hour later when Phil discovered that he was thirsty, and asked the way to the well. Mrs. Ware led him out through the kitchen, picking up a pitcher and tumbler as she went. The windmill was in motion, and while the water was gushing from the pump spout into the pitcher Phil said, meaningly, "Well, Aunt Emily, your prodigal has come back."

"Yes," she responded. "It makes me glad and proud to see how my faith in him has been justified. But, oh, boy, why didn't you give me a little warning, so that we might have had time to make ready a 'fine, fatted calf?' Jack never told me until a few minutes before you arrived that he expected you."

"I'd rather have the pleasure of surprising you all than to share in a fatted calf, any day. Besides, there won't be an occasion for trotting out such a commodity. Alex will be going back to San Antonio in less than an hour. You see he has only a few more days to spend with his lady love, as he is due in Kentucky the last of this week. He can't afford to miss even one of these gorgeous moonlight nights. Daddy is so tired with his trip

and thinking of the strain ahead of him that he is in no trim for visiting. On the way here we stopped at the Williams House and engaged rooms for to-night. I promised him that he needn't stay up for supper, could take it in his room and turn in soon after we had made a short call here. You see he didn't sleep at all coming out here, so he is considerably worse for wear. He's very much interested in Jack's case, and thinks something may be done to relieve his suffering, so maybe it will be as well for us to stay out here a bit and give them a chance to look him over."

From the quick lighting up of Mrs. Ware's face it was evident that such a hope was a new one to her. Jack had not mentioned the prospect of an operation, so Phil left the subject as quickly as possible, beginning to tell her of his last visit to Joyce. As he had come directly from her Mrs. Ware found so much to question him about, that she was surprised, when Alex Shelby joined them, to find that they had been leaning against the windmill tower for more than half an hour, too interested to think of finding a seat.

Alex's face was glowing, and he looked across at Phil with a nod of elation. "Your father con-

firms my opinion, Phil, so I'll be starting back at once."

When Mrs. Ware found out Doctor Tremont's real purpose in coming, she was thankful that Jack had spared her all those days of anxiety and apprehension that would have been hers had she known of the operation earlier. As it was there would be only one night in which to dread it. Alex was coming back in the morning with a nurse and it would all be over by noon of the next day. Now she understood their consideration in going to a hotel. It was not so much that Doctor Tremont was in no condition for visiting, as that they knew that any guests, no matter how much desired, would be a burden on the eve of such an event.

Jack's room was already nearly as bare and clean as a hospital ward, but there would still be much to do before the surgeons could begin their delicate and vital task. So when Alex Shelby went away, Doctor Tremont went with him as far as the hotel. Phil was to follow later after he had seen Mary and had the pleasure of "surprising" her.

CHAPTER XIII

JACK

A HUISACHE tree leaned over the old stone wall which separated the Herdt pasture from the road, and here Phil took his stand. He had started to find the bee-tree, following Mrs. Ware's directions, but shrill little voices floating across the meadow, made him pause. It was evident that Mary and her small charges were somewhere near.

A moment later they came in sight, and for once in her life Mary moved on towards a meeting, often rehearsed in thought, which did not end ridiculously. It would have been joy to her soul could she have seen herself as she looked to Phil, coming across the field of blue-bonnets. The fresh blue and white dress she wore, repeated the color of the waves of bloom through which she waded. Sister had twined a wreath of the same flowers around the crown of her Mexican hat, and she carried a great sheaf of them across one arm. The inevitable alarm clock swung from the other hand.

Brud was carrying a butterfly net, Sister as a great favor held Matilda, and Meliss brought up the rear with the big basket of blue-bonnets, which they had gathered as a special act of courtesy for the Guild ladies. Their voices blended happily as they drew nearer, but when they were close enough for Phil to distinguish their words the procession stood still. They had reached the place where a path crossed the one they were following, and the cross-path was a short cut to the foot-bridge.

"Here's the parting of the ways," called Mary gaily. "So run along with Meliss, now, and be sure to give Mrs. Rochester my message."

"We will," answered Brud, in a voice that was almost a happy little squeal it was so high and eager, "and we'll have another good time tomorrow! *Won't* we, Miss Mayry?"

"Indeed we will," was the answer, given so heartily and convincingly, that it was easy to see how she had obtained her hold on the two little friends who seemed so loath to leave her. They stood talking a moment, then Sister deposited the kitten on Mary's armful of flowers, with a farewell squeeze, and the parting ceremony began. Four voices, for Meliss was taking the part of the Black Panther this afternoon, repeated gravely

and distinctly the words of their daily benediction:

> "Wind and water, wood and tree,
> Wisdom, strength and courtesy,
> *Jungle favor go with thee!*"

Then Mary called as they started down the path, "Good-bye, Mowgli and Mowglina! Good-bye, Panther," and a trio of happy voices answered "Good-bye, Baloo!"

It was a childish performance, but Brud and Sister went through their part so seriously, as if it had been an incantation of some kind, that Phil did not smile as he watched the little by play. It was proof to him that Mary had accomplished what she had set out to do. She had inspired them with an ambition to always "keep tryst" just as Edryn's window had inspired her.

Feeling that she had had a particularly satisfactory afternoon, Mary answered their last wave with a swing of the hand that held the clock, and started on towards the stone wall. If her attention had not been engrossed by her efforts to hold the big armful of blue-bonnets, the clock and the squirming kitten without dropping one of the three, she would have seen Phil stepping out from the shadow of the huisache to meet her. But the kitten struggled out

of her arms and climbed up on her shoulder, catching its claws in her collar, and biting playfully at her chin.

"Matilda, you little mischief!" scolded Mary affectionately, "How am I ever going to get over this stone wall with you acting so?"

"Come on! I'll help you!" spoke up Phil from the other side.

The expression of utter amazement which spread over her face when she looked up and saw him standing in front of her was even more amusing than he had anticipated it would be. Despite Jack's hints and the fact that they had set her to picturing Phil's possible coming, the surprise of his actual presence was so overwhelming that she could scarcely speak.

She let him take the clock and the wildcat from her, and put them down on his side of the wall with the flowers, but not until she had climbed to the top of the wall and felt the firm clasp of his hands, outstretched to help her down, did she persuade herself that she was not dreaming. Then the face that she turned towards him fairly beamed, and he thought as he looked down at her that it was well worth the long journey, to find some one so genuinely glad to see him.

"When did you come? Have you been to the house? Was Jack very much surprised?"

The questions poured out in a steady stream as soon as she found her voice, and if he had not been looking at her, he could have well believed that she was the same amusing child she was when he found her running away from the Indian on the desert road to Lee's ranch. But he could not look away long enough to keep up the illusion. There was a charm about her face which drew his eyes irresistibly back to it. He tried to determine just what that charm was. It was not of feature, for much as she had improved, she did not at all measure up to his standard of beauty.

Presently he decided that it was just Mary's own self, her interesting, original personality shining out through her eyes and speaking through every movement of her mobile lips, which made her so attractive. Her years of effort to grow up to her ideal of all that was sweet and maidenly had left their imprint on her face. Naturally unselfish, trouble and hard times had broadened her sympathies and taught her a still deeper consideration for others. Loneliness and a dearth of amusement had developed her own resources for entertainment, and taught her to find something of interest in every

object and person about her. As he looked at her he thought it a pity that more of the girls of his acquaintance couldn't have a course in the same hard school of experience which had developed Mary into such a lovable and interesting character. He felt that in the one year since he had seen her last, she had grown so far past his knowledge of her, that it would be well worth while to cultivate her acquaintance further.

It was some distance from the pasture to the cottage, and as they walked, Phil had time to tell her of his trip to Warwick Hall, and to deliver the mixture of messages from the girls, which by this time had resolved into a ridiculous hotch-potch, despite his effort to keep them separate, and his reference to the memorandum that Betty had given him. Then he presented the ivy leaf which he had plucked for her, as proof that he had actually walked in her beloved garden.

Up to that time there had been so much to say that Mary had not discovered that Doctor Tremont was in Bauer also. The explanation came about when they reached the gate, and Phil, after opening it for her to pass through, stayed on the outside himself. Her surprise at his not coming in was fully as great as it had been when she first saw him.

"The idea of your going to a hotel when you've come all the way from New York to Texas to see us!" she exclaimed. "And then not even staying to supper! Jack will be *so* disappointed."

"No," answered Phil. "He knows the reason why Daddy and I are putting up at the hotel. So does your mother, and they both think it is a good one. You run along in and ask them, and they'll convince you that I am right. I'll come over for a few minutes after supper though, just to show you that there's no hard feeling between us."

He laughed as he said it, lifting his hat and turning away. Thoroughly mystified by his manner, Mary stood a moment looking after him. It was all so strange and unreal, his sudden appearance, and then his walking off in such a mysterious way. She could hardly believe the evidence of her own eyes. Yet the tall, handsome figure striding down the road was not "of such stuff as dreams are made on." Her fingers still tingled with the warm clasp of the strong hands that had helped her over the wall.

When she went into the house it was Jack who told her of his coming ordeal, and he told her in a way to make it seem of little consequence. He said that Doctor Tremont wanted to experiment on

him. He had known of a man injured in the same way, whose suffering had been entirely relieved by the removal of a fragment of bone which pressed on the spinal cord. It would be worth while to go through almost anything to be rid of the excruciating pain he had suffered at times, and Doctor Tremont assured him that it would pass away entirely if the operation proved successful.

Not a word did he say about the greater hope that had been held out to him. As the time drew near he was beginning to lose faith in its being possible. It seemed too great a miracle for him to expect it to be wrought for him.

Mary went out to find her mother in a daze of mingled emotions. The prospect of Jack's being freed from the pain that had racked him for months made her inexpressibly happy, but she had a horror of operations. The nurse they had in Lone Rock after Jack's first one, had spent hours telling grewsome details of those she had known which were not successful. Or if they were successful from the surgeon's viewpoint, the patients usually died from shock, later.

She wanted to stay in Jack's room every minute of the time after she heard what was to be done, for she had a sickening foreboding that it might be

the last evening he would be able to talk to them. Still she was so nervous that she was afraid her frame of mind might be contagious. She wondered how her mother could sit there so calmly, talking of the trivial things that filled the round of their days, just as if to-morrow were going to be like all the commonplace yesterdays.

It was a relief to her when Phil came back, according to promise, and turned their thoughts into other channels for awhile. As he rose to go, Jack motioned to a letter lying on the table beside him, and asked Phil to post it on his way back to the hotel. Phil slipped it into his pocket, barely glancing at the envelope as he did so. It was addressed in such a big plain hand that the "Miss Elizabeth Lewis" on it, caught his attention as if the words had called out to him. Several other letters lying on the edge of the table fell to the floor as Phil's coat brushed them in passing. He stooped mechanically to pick them up, for he was busy talking, and without being conscious of having noted the address, laid them back on the table. But afterwards it occurred to him that they were all addressed to Jack, and by the same hand that had made the memorandum for him, about the girls whom he met at Warwick Hall.

Mary wondered afterwards how she ever could have lived through the next morning had it not been for Phil. She was all right as long as there was anything to do, or while she sat listening to Doctor Tremont talk to her mother and the local physician, Doctor Mackay. But as soon as Alex Shelby arrived with the nurse she fell into such a tremor of nervousness that she could scarcely keep from shaking as if she had a chill.

There was a cluster of umbrella trees in the farthest corner of the yard, and carrying some chairs out to their dense shade Phil called her to come and sit with him there. He had a glove that was ripped and he hoped she would take pity on him and sew it up. She understood perfectly well his object in putting her to work, and although her hands trembled at first so that she could barely thread a needle, she had to acknowledge inwardly that it was easier to compose herself when her hands were busy. One finger was ripped the entire length, so it took a long time to mend it neatly; to button-hole the edges on each side, and then draw the stitches together in a seam that was stronger than the original one.

Gradually she became so interested in her task and what Phil was telling her of his adventures in

the past year, that she stopped glancing every moment towards the house, and no longer jumped nervously at every sound. Once or twice she smiled at something he told her; something that would have been uproariously funny if she had heard it at any other time. Just now she could not forget the fact that Jack was lying unconscious under the surgeon's knife, and the stories the Lone Rock nurse had told her came back to haunt her with terrifying suggestions.

"I am to meet your friend, Miss Gay Melville," Phil said, when they had been sitting there a long time. "Shelby is to take Daddy and me up to the Post to-night, to dine at her house. The Major came down to the train with him when he met us yesterday morning, and delivered the invitation in person. He's a hospitable old duck, the Major. He's kin to some people that are intimate friends of Daddy's and he's almost ready to adopt us both into his family on the strength of it. Alex told me on the side that I am invited specially to meet a very particular chum of his fiancée's, Miss Roberta somebody, I can't remember the name. Miss Melville thinks I will find her my affinity, judging by what she knows of her and has heard of me."

"Roberta Mayrell," prompted Mary. "Oh, I

don't think you'll find her *that!* She's a fascinating sort of girl, but she's such a different type from — I mean — I think. Well — " She was floundering desperately to turn her sentence. " I can't imagine you'd care for her to the *affinity* point."

What she had almost said was, " She's such a different type from the Little Colonel." She had remembered just in time that she was not supposed to know about that affair. Had she not been an unintentional eaves-dropper she could not have heard his offer to Lloyd of the unset turquoise, and all that followed.

Phil noticed her embarrassment and wondered what caused it, but the subject was immediately forgotten. The door they had been watching so long opened at last, and Doctor Tremont came out and stood on the step. Phil beckoned, and he came across to the clump of umbrella trees where they were sitting. One glance at his face showed Mary that she had nothing to fear. He stood with his hand on Phil's shoulder as he said kindly,

" It's all good news, Mary. We found exactly the state of affairs that I expected. If he follows the other case on record, it will not be long till he is as strong and husky and active as this young rascal here."

He gave Phil's shoulder an affectionate grip. Mary looked up at him trying to comprehend all she had heard.

"Strong — and husky and active — as Phil?" she repeated in dull wonder. "You can't mean that he — will ever be able — to *walk?*"

The question came in dry, sobbing gasps.

"Yes, just that."

She stood up. The news was so stupendous, the reaction so great that everything turned black. She sat down again giddily. The sympathetic faces, the trees, everything seemed to be whirling around and around. She heard Phil's voice, but it sounded as if it were miles away.

"Brace up, little Vicar! You're surely not going limp *now*, just when fortune is making such a tremendous turn in your favor."

"No," she said, shaking herself and fighting off the faintness. Such a feeling had never assailed her before, and she did not know what to make of it. "You see, nobody ever told me — I didn't know such a heavenly thing was possible! I can't believe it yet. Oh, are you *sure?*"

She looked up into the strong, calm face of the gray-haired old surgeon, as if his answer meant life or death.

"As sure as any one can be about any operation," he answered. "He has everything in his favor; there is the clean life he has always led, back of him; his splendid constitution, the fine aseptic air of these hills. Everything is favorable. The paralysis and all the other trouble was caused by one thing. We have removed the cause, and I see no reason why he should not recover completely in time. He has rallied from the anesthetic, and is so happy over the result, so buoyantly hopeful, that that of itself, with his dogged determination to get well, will go a long distance toward pulling him through."

The tears were rolling down Mary's cheeks, but she did not know it, nor did she know that her face was ashine at the same time with the inward light of a joy too great for telling.

"To think that he'll be able to *walk* again!" she exclaimed over and over, as if trying to grasp the greatness of such a fact. "And *you* did it! Oh, Doctor Tremont! There isn't anything good enough in heaven or earth, for the hand that could bring a happiness like that to my brother Jack!"

As she tried brokenly to express her gratitude, and the good old doctor tried as hard to deny any obligation on her part, saying he had only partly

squared himself with the Wares, Phil slipped away. The scene was coming near to upsetting his own equanimity. Besides he had some telegrams to send. There were three and save for the address they were identically the same:

"Operation successful. Every reason to expect complete and rapid recovery."

Stuart Tremont received his just as he was driving in at the gate of his country place. A messenger boy on a wheel handed him the yellow envelope. He hurried into the house, catching up little Patricia, and swinging her to his shoulder as she ran to meet him. Eugenia was coming down the stairs.

"Good news!" he cried boyishly. "Hurrah for Daddy! He's brought the year of jubilee to the Ware family, root and branch."

"To say nothing of the professional laurels he has added to the house of Tremont," Eugenia answered. "Sometimes I'm tempted to wish you hadn't followed in his footsteps, Stuart, and chosen such a hard life. But when I think what just *one* cure like that means, I wouldn't have you anything else in the world than what you are, for all the kingdoms of the earth. Oh, I'm so glad for all of them! Joyce will be nearly wild with joy. She has been so broken up over Jack's condition ever since the

accident, that now her happiness will be something good to see. I must try to go in to the city for a short call before we start West."

Joyce's happiness *was* good to see. When her telegram came she was starting out of the studio on her way to an interview with the art editor of a magazine that had published one of her sketches. She could not turn back because the appointed hour was too near at hand and the interview too important. So she stood in the corrider after she left the elevator, wiping away her happy tears until she was composed enough to go out on the street. And because she had to share her good news with some one, she told the janitor's wife. The hearty sympathy of that motherly Irish woman sent her away as if she were treading on air.

The art editor, who dimly remembered her as a very quiet, reserved young girl, wondered at the transformation when she came into his office, looking like the very incarnation of Joy. She had been afraid of the stern, forbidding man before, saying to Henrietta that she always expected him to bark at her. But to-day, to her own surprise as well as his, she found herself telling him her good news, just as she had poured it out to the janitor's wife, because she couldn't help it. That his congratula-

tions should be quite as hearty as Mrs. Phelan's caused her no surprise then, for at the moment Jack's recovery seemed such a miracle that she felt the whole world must be interested in hearing of it. But she wondered afterwards what he must have thought of her for pouring out her confidences to him about Jack as impulsively as if he had been an old friend instead of a stranger.

Had she only known it, that impulsive outburst aroused a friendly interest in her that the reserved man rarely felt in struggling young artists, and he bought all the sketches she had with her. An hour before, that of itself would have been enough to send her back to the studio rejoicing; but now it seemed such a drop in the bucket compared to the news she had for Mrs. Boyd and Lucy and Henrietta, that she forgot to mention the little matter of the sale for several days.

There was some delay in the transmission of Betty's message. It did not reach her until nearly sundown. She was passing through the lower hall on the way to the drawing-room, when the envelope was put into her hands. The house suddenly seemed to grow stifling. She needed all out of doors to breathe in. So running down the marble steps to the river, she walked along to the circular sea sur-

rounding the old willow. With the tree between herself and the Hall, she looked out across the Potomac, that a gorgeous sunset was turning into a river of gold.

The slip of paper fluttered in her fingers but she feared to read it. Such life-long tragedies can be told sometimes in the short space of ten words. But at last she summoned courage to glance at the message, after which she read it through slowly, several times.

Then looking up above the shining of the river to the glory of the sunset sky beyond, she whispered softly, as she had always done since she was a little child, in the great moments of her life, *"Thank you, dear God!"*

The same afternoon Doctor Tremont and Phil and Alex went to San Antonio, leaving the nurse and Doctor Mackay in charge of Jack. The Tremonts, after dining at Major Melville's, were to take the night train for California. They had promised Elsie to be with her as long as possible before her wedding. She had seen little of Phil for several years. He was taking a month's vacation; the first long one since he started to work, in order to spend the most of it with her in the old Gold-of-Ophir rose-garden, that had been their

earliest playground. Doctor Tremont did not expect to come back to Bauer, but Phil promised to stop off for a few days on his return trip, which would be in a little less than three weeks.

After the departure of their guests the family settled down to wait patiently and happily for time to finish the process of healing. Since such great cause for thanksgiving had come to them, the small ills that every one is heir to, almost lost the power to annoy. When Mary burned herself badly with a hot iron, when she ruined her best dress by spilling a bottle of ink, when the little wildcat, which grew dearer every day, was crippled so badly by a falling wood-pile that it had to be put out of its misery, there were some tears and regrets; but the unfailing balm for everything was the thought: "*But Jack's getting well!* Nothing else matters much."

As Spring deepened, the wild flowers grew still more abundant. Acres of wild verbenas spread their royal purple underfoot, and the china-berry trees hung answering pennons overhead of the same kingly color. Spider-wort starred the grass. Wine-cups held up their crimson chalices along every lane. Mexican blankets sported their gaudy stripes of red and yellow, and even the

cacti, thorny and forbidding, burst into gorgeous bloom.

And then, just at Easter, a waxen blossom, snow-white, and sweet-breathed as the narcissus, sprang up all over the hills. Rain lilies, Miss Edna called them. Norman and Mary gathered great armfuls of them and carried them to Mrs. Rochester to put around the chancel. They seemed to suit the little country church far better than the florists' lilies would have done. The casement windows stood open, and Mary sat looking out through one of them, listening to the reading of the account of the first Easter:

"And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun."

But it was not the green Spring-time world outside she saw. It was Jack's face as she had caught a glimpse of it, earlier in the morning, when he lay listening to his mother read those same words. She had heard him say in one of the pauses:

"Mother, sometimes I am so happy I don't see how I can endure such blessedness! I've dreamed so many times that I was well, only to waken and find it all a cruel mistake, that now when I realize it's really going to be true — that life still holds

everything for me — oh, I can't tell you!" He broke off, a smile of ineffable happiness spreading over his face. "Now I know how Lazarus felt when the stone was rolled away and he heard the call 'Come forth!'"

That smile was still before Mary's eyes when the white-robed choir rose to sing, and she joined with all her heart in the chant, which swelled forth at the end of every line into a glad "*Alleluia!*"

CHAPTER XIV

SAN JACINTO DAY

It was the twentieth of April when Phil returned to Bauer, and for the second time his visit was cut disappointingly short. The reason was that he had promised Major Melville the night he dined with him, to be back in San Antonio in time for the Carnival. The Major wanted to take him to a Mexican restaurant for a typical Mexican supper the night of the twenty-first. On the twenty-second there would be an entertainment for the Queen of the Carnival at her Court of the Roses; something too unique and beautiful for him to miss, they all said. Then, on the twenty-third, San Jacinto Day, which all loyal Texans keep as a state holiday, the annual Battle of Flowers would take place in the plaza in front of the Alamo, which they call their "Cradle of Liberty."

The Flower Battle was an old institution, the Major explained. But this was only the second year for the Queen's Court, and it was something

so surpassingly beautiful that he thought it ought to become a regular feature of every carnival.

Roberta, who was also at the dinner, added her persuasions.

"You'll think you're back in the time 'when knighthood was in flower,'" she insisted. "I wish every Easterner accustomed to poking fun at our state could see it. Nobody knows what I suffered at school from having people talk as if all Texans are 'long horns.'"

"Roberta was one of the duchesses last year," explained Lieutenant Boglin. "You should have seen her sweep up to the throne when they announced, 'Her Grace, the Lady Roberta of the House of Mayrell!' She certainly looked the real article, and was a far cry from a long-horn then."

"Don't emphasize the *then* so pointedly, Bogey," ordered Roberta.

When Phil hesitated to accept because his time in Bauer would be shortened so much thereby, Gay insisted that she was going to invite Mary down for the Queen's entertainment and the Flower Battle anyhow, and that if he refused to come Mary would be cut out of the pleasure of coming, for, of course, she couldn't leave a guest behind, under the circumstances.

So presently the Major's programme was arranged to his partial satisfaction. It was not complete, because he could not persuade the old doctor, who intended spending several months in California, to return also.

Gay went up to Bauer that same week, directly after Alex Shelby's departure. She wanted to deliver her invitation in person, and to spend the day with the Ware family. She liked to hear them sing Alex's praises. *He* was the one who discovered that something could be done for Jack, and he it was who had summoned Doctor Tremont, and every discussion of the subject always brought out the gratifying fact that had it not been for him, Jack would not now be on the high road to recovery. She had found, too, that Mary made a most satisfactory little confidante; much better than Roberta, for she seemed really interested in Alex and all that pertained to him, and never laughed at Gay's rhapsodies and made cynical remarks about "before and after taking" as the worldly-wise Roberta did.

Two thoughts gave Mary the utmost satisfaction in accepting the invitation. One was, there would be time before San Jacinto Day to make up the white dress for which her mother had embroidered

the lovely rosebuds. The other was, that an occasion had come at last when it would be appropriate for her to wear Lloyd's gift, the beautiful chiffon scarf, spangled with the crystal beads which sparkled like dewdrops.

With only a day and a half to spend in Bauer, Phil could do few of the things she had planned for his entertainment. Now that Jack was better, she did not like to take him away from the house long enough to ride out to the Barnaby ranch and pole up to Fernbank, and such things. Instead, all the time was spent so that Jack could have his full share of the visit. She would have been greatly disappointed had she not known she was going to see Phil several times during her visit to Gay.

He went down to the Mexican supper on the twenty-first, and she followed next morning. He was to take luncheon with the Mayrells that day, so she did not see him till night, when they all went in the same party to the entertainment, Phil and Roberta, Gay and Billy Mayrell, Mary and Lieutenant Boglin.

The stage of Beethoven Hall was turned into a bower of roses on this eve of San Jacinto Day, and a great audience, assembling early, awaited the coming of the Queen of the Carnival and her royal

court. In the patent of nobility given by her gracious majesty to her attendants, was the command:

"We bid you to join with all of our loyal subjects in the Mirth and Merriment of this Festival of Flowers, which doth commemorate the glorious freedom of this, our Texas, won by the deathless heroism of the defenders of the Alamo, and the Victory of San Jacinto."

This call for Mirth and Merriment struck the keynote of the carnival, and everyone in the great assembly seemed to be responding with the proper festival spirit.

Back in the crowded house in a seat next the aisle and almost at the entrance door, sat Mary Ware, completely entranced by all that was going on about her. Lieutenant Boglin was beside her, and in the chairs directly behind them were Gay and Billy Mayrell. Roberta and Phil were in front of them. They had come early to secure these chairs, and the men had given the girls the end seats in order that they might have unobstructed view of both aisle and stage. They all turned so that conversation was general until the house was nearly filled, then Roberta said something which drew Phil's attention wholly to herself, and he

turned his back on the others, beginning to talk exclusively to her.

Gay, who appeared to know at least every fourth person who came down the aisle, sat, like most of the audience, with her head turned expectantly towards the door, and kept up a running comment to Mary on the acquaintances who passed her with nods of recognition or brief words of greeting. The thrum of the orchestra, the sight of so many smiling faces, although they were strange to her, and the blended colors of fashionable evening gowns would have furnished Mary ample entertainment after her dull winter in the country; but it was doubly entertaining with Gay to point out distinguished people and give her bits of information, supplemented by Billy and Bogey about this one from the Post and that one from the town.

She wished that Phil could hear too. She wanted him to know what prominent personages he was in the midst of. Once when some world-known celebrity was escorted up the aisle she leaned over and called his attention to the procession. He looked up with a smile to follow her glance, and made a joking response, but returned so quickly to the fascinating Roberta, that Mary felt that his

interest in everything else just then was merely perfunctory.

She remembered what Gay had said about his finding his affinity, and stole a side glance at Roberta to study her in the new light which Phil's interest threw upon her. Now in the days when Phil worshipped at the Little Colonel's shrine, Mary was perfectly content to have it so. She would have walked over hot plowshares to have brought his romance to a happy consummation. It seemed so eminently fitting that the two people in the world whom she had invested with halos, should stand together on the same pedestal in her affections. To her doting eyes, Lloyd was such an angel that she knew Phil must be happy with her, and Phil measured so fully up to the notch on the sterling yard-stick which indicated the inches and ells that a true prince should be, that she was sure no girl who wove her Clotho-web for him could fail to find the happiness that was written for her in the stars.

Mary had grown accustomed to the fact by this time that she had made a mistake in her reading of the stars. Lloyd was destined for someone else. But it had not occurred to her before that maybe Phil was, too. The thought that he would carry

a secret sorrow with him to the grave, invested him with a melancholy charm that made him all the more interesting. It was somewhat of a shock to her to see him watch the downward sweep and swift upward glance of Roberta's pretty eyes in such an admiring way, although Mary herself had heretofore found pleasure in watching them. Of course she didn't want him to go on suffering always, still — she didn't want him to forget.

In her passionate loyalty to Lloyd she resented his bestowing a second glance on any girl who was any less of an angel than she; and yet her loyalty to Phil made her want him to have whatever *he* wanted. Knowing how many men had fallen victims to Roberta's flirtatious little ways, she longed to save Phil from the same fate. The growing alarm with which she watched them was almost comical for one of her years. It was comical because it was so motherly. Not a particle of jealousy or a thought of self entered into it.

A hush fell on the great audience, and the curtain rose on a tableau of surpassing loveliness. The stage seemed to be one mass of American Beauty roses. The walls were festooned and garlanded with them. They covered the high throne in the centre and bordered the steps leading up to it. They

hung in long streamers on either side from ceiling to floor. Grouped against this glowing background, stood the noble dukes, the lords-in-waiting and their esquires. The gay-colored satins and brocades of their old-time court costumes, the gleam of jewelled sword-hilts, the shine of powdered perukes, transported one from prosaic times and lands to the old days of chivalry and romance.

The jester shook his bells, the trumpeters in their plumed helmets raised their long, shining trumpets, and sounded the notes that heralded the first approach. Then the Lord Chamberlain stepped forth in a brave array of pink satin, carrying the gold stick that was his insignia of office.

"That's me friend," whispered Gay, "the man who originated this affair. I tell him I think he must be one of the Knights of the Round Table re-incarnated, or else the wizard Merlin come to life again, to bring such a beautiful old court scene into being in the way he has done."

She stopped whispering to hear the impressive announcement he was making, in a voice that rang through the hall:

"Her Grace, Lady Elizabeth, of the House of Lancaster!"

Immediately every eye turned from the stage to

look at the rose-trimmed entrance door. The orchestra struck into an inspiring march and the stately beauty, first to arrive at the Court of Roses, began her triumphal entry up the long aisle. She passed so near to Mary that the tulle bow on the directoire stick she carried almost touched her cheek with its long floating ends, light as gossamer web. And Mary, clasping her hands together in an ecstasy of admiration, noted every detail of the beautiful costume in its slow passing.

"It's like the Princess Olga's," she thought, recalling the old fairy-tale of the enchanted necklace. "Whiter than the whiteness of the fairest lily, fine, like the finest lace that the frost-elves weave, and softer than the softest ermine of the snow."

The long court train that swept behind her was all aglisten, as if embroidered with dewdrops and pearls. Mary watched her, scarcely breathing till she had ascended the steps to the stage. Then her appointed duke came forward to meet her and led her to the steps of the throne.

The music stopped. Again the heralds sounded their trumpets and the Lord Chamberlain announced the next duchess.

"You see," explained Gay, hastily, as all necks craned toward the door again, "each girl is

duchess of some rose or other, like Killarney or Malmaison or Maréchal Niel."

One after another they passed by to take their places beside the throne, all in such exquisitely beautiful costumes that Mary thought that each one must be indelibly photographed on her memory. But when they had passed, all she could remember of so many was a spangled procession of court trains, covered with cascades of crystal and silver and pearls and strung jewels.

Each time a new duchess swept slowly and majestically by, Mary turned a quick glance toward Phil to see if he were properly impressed; but when the Queen was announced, she had no eyes for anything but the regal figure proceeding slowly up the aisle, amid the admiring applause which almost drowned the music of the march.

It was at this juncture that Phil glanced back at Mary. Her face so plainly showed the admiration which filled her that he continued to watch her with an amused smile, saying to Roberta in an undertone:

"Look at Mary's rapt expression! She's always adored queens and such things, and now she feels that she's up against the real article."

"I don't wonder," answered Roberta, herself so

interested that she turned her back on Phil until the royal party had passed by. Two little pages in costumes of white and gold, with plumed hats and spangled capes, bore the royal train, and Roberta tried to upset the dignity of one of them, who was a little friend of hers, by whispering, "Hello, Gerald, where did you get that feather?"

In Mary's estimation it was not the diamond crown that marked the Queen as especially regal, not the jewelled sceptre nor the white satin gown, heavily embroidered in gold roses and gleaming with brilliants; it was the fact that the long train borne by the little pages was of *cloth-of-gold*. To Mary, cloth-of-gold was more royal than ermine or purple velvet, and lovingly associated in her thought with the white samite of Tennyson's idyls. It was cloth-of-gold that the Lily Maid of Astolat had worn to her burying, and the only piece that Mary had ever seen was the drapery over the bier of the fair Elaine, when Lloyd took the part of the Lily Maid, in the tableaux at The Beeches. When she caught sight of it she clasped her hands still tighter, and never took her eyes from it until the Queen was seated on her throne, and the long, shining folds swept down beside her, the full length of the steps.

The presentation scene followed. In the name of The Order of the Alamo, the Queen was given a magnificent necklace, with a jewelled pendant. After that the visiting duchesses were received, representing many towns of Texas, from El Paso to the gulf. They came with their maids of honor, and when they had been met by their lords-in-waiting and their esquires, the entertainment for the Queen began.

Grecian maidens bearing garlands of roses danced before her. The second group was of seven little barefoot girls, carrying golden lyres, and forming a rainbow background for another small maid who gave a cymbal dance. The Grecian dances were followed by a gavotte of the time of Louis XIII, in which all the dukes and duchesses took part.

"They danced the minuet last year," commented Gay. "This is the end of the performance, but we'll wait to watch them go out, on their way to the Queen's ball. I went to that too, last year. These are good seats; we catch them coming and going."

The audience remaining seated until all the members of the Court had passed out two by two, had ample time for comment and observation. Bogey,

who, seeing Mary's absorbing interest in the scene, had considerately left her undisturbed most of the time, now leaned over and began to talk. As Gay had once said, "When it comes to giving a girl a good time, Bogey is quite the nicest officer in the bunch," and Phil, overhearing scraps of their conversation, concluded that Mary was finding her escort as entertaining as the pageant. A backward glance now and then showed that she was not watching the recessional as closely as she was listening to him.

As they all started out of the hall together, moving slowly along with the crowd, barely an inch at a time, they talked over arrangements for the next day. Lieutenant Boglin could not be counted in. He had to ride in the procession with the rest of the troops from the Post who were to take part in the parade. Billy Mayrell had another engagement, so Phil proposed to take all three of the girls under his wing. It was too late to secure seats in the plaza from which to watch the flower battle. The Major had been able to get only two. So Phil said the Major and his wife should occupy those. He would come around for the girls in an automobile and they could watch the parade seated in that.

There was a blockade near the door, but as soon as they could get through it, they all walked up the street to a building in which the Major had secured the use of a second-story window, from which they could watch the parade of the Queen and her court on their way to the ball. The time spent in waiting was well worth while, when it finally appeared. The horses of the chariots were led by Nubian servants, and each chariot represented a rose, wherein sat the duchess who had made it her choice.

The Queen's chariot was surmounted by a mammoth American Beauty rose, and as she smiled out from the midst of its petals, Mary had one more entrancing view of the royal robes. This time they were lit up by the red gleam of torches, for eight torch-bearers, four on a side, accompanied each chariot, and added their light to the brilliant illuminations of the streets.

"You must see the river," said Billy Mayrell, after the procession had passed by. "Nobody can describe it, with the lights strung across it from shore to shore all down its winding course. It makes you think of Venice."

He led them to a place where they could look across a bend and see one of the bridges. It was

strung so thickly with red lights which outlined every part, that it seemed to be made of glowing rubies, and its reflection in the water made another shining ruby bridge below, wavering on the dark current.

Mary leaned over the rail watching the shimmering lights, and feeling dreamily that this City of the Alamo was an enchanted city; that the buildings looming up on every side were not for the purpose of barter and trade. They were thrown up simply as backgrounds for the dazzling illuminations which outlined them against the night sky. The horns of the revellers answering each other down every street, the music of distant bands, the laughter of the jostling throngs, all deepened the illusion.

It did not seem possible that this could be the city through which she had once tramped in the rain, discouraged and forlorn, in search of a home. It was a realm given over utterly to "Mirth and Merriment," where a gracious young queen held sway, where illness and trouble and grief had no part.

"I don't wonder that the Major wants everybody not already a loyal Texan to see this," she

said to the Lieutenant. "It's enough to make one want to live here always."

She made the same remark to Gay next afternoon, as she sat beside her on the back seat of the automobile. Roberta was on the front seat with Phil. He had ordered a machine which he could drive himself, and they had taken a run through the principal streets to see all the decorations, before coming to a standstill to wait for the procession. It was an inspiring scene, the grandstand packed with applauding spectators, the plaza crowded from park to curbstone. Shops and offices had closed for the day, schools were dismissed and all work abandoned as far as possible, in order that everyone might share in the Carnival playtime. The wise old town knows the full worth of holidays, and makes the most of each one.

The chariots Mary had seen in the brilliantly-lighted streets the night before, lost some of their glamour seen by day; but the duchesses and their ladies-in-waiting were dressed now in the colors of their chosen roses instead of the court-robes, and there were many new features in this parade; floats and handsomely decorated carriages, and a long line of troops from the post with the famous

military bands. It was hard to sit still when they played so inspiringly.

Back and forth in front of the Alamo went the two divisions of the parade, meeting and passing and turning to meet and pass again, all the while pelting each other with flowers, till the plaza where they rode was covered deep with them. And the bands played and the people cheered, till the smallest schoolboy in their midst felt a thrill of gratitude to the heroes whose deeds they were commemorating. He might miss the deeper meaning of it all, but he grasped one fact clearly enough: that had it not been for the grim battle which those brave fellows fought to the death, there would have been no San Jacinto Day for him. No pageant-filled holiday to make one feel that it is a great and glorious thing to be a son of the Lone Star State.

Phil dined at the Major's again that night, and Roberta was the only other guest beside Mary. Gay had objected when her father proposed others, saying that they intended to devote the entire evening to music. Since they had discovered what a magnificent voice Mr. Tremont had, and he had discovered what proficient accompanists she and Roberta were, they had decided to treat themselves to a musicale given by the three, with only Mary

for audience. The family could listen, of course, but with the understanding that there was to be no conversation. As the Major had an engagement which took him out immediately after dinner and Mrs. Melville had some friends drop in to call soon after, it happened that their audience was limited to one.

Now the one thing that Mary enjoyed above all others was hearing Phil sing, and quite the pleasantest part of her whole visit was that last evening spent in listening to him, with Roberta at the piano, and Gay improvising wonderfully soft and lovely accompaniments on her violin. Mary had heard two celebrated opera singers while in Washington, but in her opinion neither one equalled Phil.

Phil's surprise would have been unbounded could he have known that she was comparing his singing to the angel Israfel's, "whose heartstrings were a lute, and who had the sweetest voice of all God's creatures." It would have been a matter of still greater surprise if he could have known the exalted opinion that Mary had of him. Not that any sentimental interest entered into her regard for him. Despite her eighteen years and her womanly attitude towards the world in general, she was still a little girl, and a very humble little girl in her

own estimation, as far as he was concerned. He was her ideal; the man whose good opinion she valued above all things, whose approval made her inexpressibly happy, and whose advice she eagerly followed.

She had adored him for years as little girls do sometimes look up to and adore grown men, and had stored away in her memory many a remark that he forgot as soon as it was uttered. There was the time she confided to him her grief at being so fat and her ambition to be an "airy, fairy Lillian," like Lloyd. He did not even smile, and he answered so gravely and kindly that she remembered even yet the consolation that his words gave her. Another time she overheard him referring to her as an "angel unawares," because she had unknowingly done him a service by repeating something Lloyd had said about him.

From that time on, that was the part she longed to play in his life. She burned to be the "angel unawares" who could help him to the attainment of everything he wanted. That was why she had been so bitterly disappointed when Lloyd's engagement to Rob Moore had been announced. She wanted Lloyd to marry Phil because she knew that was what Phil wanted. Now that that was not

possible she was just as ready to help him if he should ever love again. She hardly thought that he could do *that,* though. It seemed so incredible that he should ever find another as fine and high and sweet as the Princess Winsome; it was still more incredible that once having set his mark that high he could ever look at anything less.

His powerful, well-trained voice filled the room with a sweetness that brought an ache to her throat and sometimes tears to her eyes. Presently Roberta rummaged out some old, old melodies — "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and the "Bedouin Love-song."

When she asked for that last one, Mary cringed inwardly, as if she had been hurt herself, so sure was she that it must bring up painful memories to Phil. She fully expected to see him lay it aside with some excuse for not singing it. She remembered as vividly as if it were only last night how she had sat on the floor of the library at The Locusts, listening to the notes of his guitar as he sang to Lloyd outside on the porch:

> "Till the stars are old
> And the sun grows cold
> And the leaves of the Judgment
> Book unfold."

For the life of her, she couldn't see how Lloyd ever listened to any other wooing after that. Had any one sung that to *her* in that voice it would have won her so completely that she would have risen like the Sleeping Beauty at the call of the prince.

> "Beyond the night — across the day —
> Through all the world she followed him."

To her surprise, Phil took up the sheet of music as nonchalantly as if he had never seen it before. But when he began to sing it seemed to her anxious ear that he sang it more feelingly than anything she had ever heard. It was plain enough to her now that he had not ceased to care. It wrung her heart to hear him sing it so, pouring out his soul in a flood of noble devotion which he knew could never be requited, but which would live on till the sun lost its heat and the stars their light.

"I love that song," said Roberta, laying it aside to pick up another. "But I'd like to meet that fiery old duck of a Bedouin when the leaves of the Judgment Book *do* unfold, and find out how long his devotion kept up to high-water mark." Then she trilled airily, "Men are gay deceivers ever."

Under the circumstances the remark seemed

flippant, almost sacrilegious, to Mary. She gave Roberta a disapproving glance behind her back, thinking, "Little *you* know about it. If you could see as I do now, how Phil is hiding his real feelings, you'd realize that there's *one* man, at least, capable of the deathless devotion you scoff at."

The evening was over all too soon. Phil was to take Roberta home on his way back to the hotel, and when he rose to go said, "I'll not make my farewells now. My train doesn't leave till nearly noon to-morrow, so I'll call some time during the morning to pay my respects to the Major and see you all again."

"You'll have to say good-by to Mary now," said Gay. "She insists on taking that horrid freight car back to Bauer, at seven in the morning."

"I must," said Mary. "You know they need me, now that the nurse is gone, and I've already been away two days."

Roberta went out into the hall for her hat, and Gay followed as far as the door, talking as she went.

"And I haven't had any visit with *you* at all," said Phil, who was standing, hat in hand, looking down at Mary. "I haven't had a word with you

by yourself, and you haven't confided once in me or asked me a single scrap of advice. It doesn't seem natural. But I'm not going to let you escape me this way; I'm going down to the train in the morning to see you off."

Gay turned in time to hear the last part of his sentence. "That is," she corrected, "if you are called in time. They don't always do it at hotels when they say they will. I've had some bad experiences that way. So if he doesn't appear, Mary, you can console yourself with the thought that he's like Kathleen Mavourneen — 'slumbering still.'"

"I'll be there," was the confident reply, as he smiled down into Mary's wistful eyes and held out his hand to say good-night. "Electric bells are not as romantic as the 'horn of the hunter heard on the hill,' but they're more effective when it comes to getting a fellow up in the morning; you'll see me sure."

CHAPTER XV

NEW TRAILS

THE train to Bauer left so early that Mary had to take the first street-car passing the Post, in order to reach the station in time. Gay had announced her intention of going down with her, but did not awaken until Mary, who occupied an adjoining room, was nearly dressed and the maid was bringing up a hastily-prepared breakfast, on a tray. But Mary could not honestly share Gay's regrets at being late. She had dressed noiselessly on purpose not to waken her. She wanted to go alone in order to have those last moments with Phil all to herself, and she was so elated when she finally got away from the house unaccompanied that she could have sung aloud.

Her route took her through Alamo plaza again, and the streets which still bore witness to the presence of the Carnival. All the buildings were still gay with bunting, and flags flapped merrily in the morning sunshine. She wondered which would be

first to reach the station, and all the way down, Phil's face was before her. She could see just the way he would look, coming towards her through the crowd, tall and distinguished and with such a jolly twinkle in his handsome eyes. And he would call out, "Hullo, little Vicar; I beat you to it!" or some such friendly greeting as that.

She did not know that she was smiling to herself, but it made no difference. There was no one to see, for the men on the car were all hidden behind their morning papers. When she reached the station only a few people were in sight, and when she climbed into the coach at the end of the long line of freight-cars, there were not more than half a dozen passengers aboard. All of them looked sleepy, and a series of gentle snores attracted her attention to an old countryman, curled up on a back seat with his valise for a pillow.

On her way in she had passed through the waiting-room and given a hasty look around to see if Phil were ahead of her. Glancing up at the clock she found that she had ten minutes to spare. Three of these passed in getting settled and in taking an inventory of her fellow-passengers. Then she began to hang out of the window and anxiously watch the waiting-room door. She was growing uneasy.

Maybe the clerk *had* forgotten to call him. Maybe he *was* "slumbering still," as Gay had prophesied. He might have missed the car he should have taken, or there might be a tie-up somewhere along the line.

A colored man hurried into the coach with a chunk of ice for the water cooler. The conductor came down the platform looking at his watch, and signalled something to a brakeman. Mary put her head out of the window again and looked anxiously up and down, whispering in a flutter of nervousness, "Oh, *why* doesn't he come? Why *doesn't* he come? There's only a minute or two left and there won't be time for a word."

She would not admit the possibility of his not coming at all, until she heard the warning, "All aboard!" the ringing of the engine bell, and felt the jerk and jar which proclaimed all too plainly that the car was in motion. She was so disappointed that she could hardly keep the tears back. Her last thought before falling asleep the night before and the first one on awakening had been that she was going to see the "Best Man" by himself a few moments, without any talkative Roberta to absorb his attention, or any other people to run away with the conversation.

It was a very disconsolate little face that turned

towards the open window to hide its disappointment from possibly curious neighbors. She found it hard to wink the tears back when she was so deeply, grievously disappointed. Her back was turned resolutely towards the aisle and her arms were crossed on the window-sill. In that position she could not see the rear door of the car open and some one come in from the back platform. He stood a moment, his hat in one hand and a suit-case in the other, breathing fast as if he had been running. Then after a searching glance through the car, he went directly down the aisle and stopped beside Mary's seat. Her attitude, even to the droop of her hat-brim, proclaimed her dejection so clearly that a smile twitched the corners of his mouth. Then he said in a deep voice, so deep that it was fairly sepulchral, "I beg pardon, Miss. May I occupy this end of the seat?"

Startled by the strange voice so near, she turned a very sober and unsmiling face to see what manner of person had accosted her. Then she exclaimed, in astonishment, "Why, Phil Tremont! How ever did you get on without my seeing you? I looked and looked and thought you must have gotten left!"

Then realizing that the train was well under way and they had been carried some distance past the station, she cried in alarm, "But you can't get off!

They're carrying you away!" She was almost wringing her hands in her excitement.

"Well, I don't mind it if you don't," said Phil, sitting down beside her and laughing at her concern. "I'm going along with you. Something Miss Roberta said last night on her way home started me to thinking, and — the result was, I decided to spend another day and night in Bauer. It's positively my last appearance, however. I'll leave for good in the morning."

What Roberta could have said to make such a change in his plans was more than Mary could imagine. She almost had to bite her tongue to keep from asking, and Phil, knowing that he had aroused her wildest curiosity, laughed again. But he wasted no more time in teasing her.

"No, really," he said, "I was joking. A telegram from my firm routed me out about six o'clock this morning. They want me to go to St. Louis to see some parties before returning to New York. I figured it out that I could double things up there so as to give me one more day here. But it took me so long to figure it, that, by the time I had made up my mind, there was only a moment to stuff my things into my suit-case and call a taxicab. When I got down to the station I saw I had about three

minutes in which to snatch a sandwich and a cup of coffee at the lunch counter; but the coffee was so hot I came near missing my train. Had to run a block and swing up on the rear platform. If it had been the regular express I couldn't have caught it. Luckily it was a freight, so here I am."

He did not add that an unaccountable impulse to go back to Bauer had seized him the night before when he bade her good-night, or that the impulse had been strengthened afterward by a casual remark of Roberta's about Lieutenant Boglin. Roberta thought she saw the first symptoms of a budding romance on Bogey's part.

Not being given to the practice of analyzing his feelings, Phil did not stop to ask himself why it should make any difference to him what the lieutenant thought of little Mary Ware, nor did he realize at the time how much that remark influenced his decision to spend one more day with her. Afterwards he used to say that it was Fate and not himself that was responsible for that journey; that it was destined from the beginning he should chase madly after that freight-train, catch it, and thereby give himself four long uninterrupted hours in which to grow better acquainted with her than he had ever been before.

At the end of that time he knew why he had been drawn back. It was that her real self, the depth of whose charm he had not even half suspected, should be revealed to him in the intimacy of this conversation. It changed his whole attitude toward her to find how much she had changed herself; how she had grown and developed. In some ways she was still the amusing child whose unexpected sayings had first attracted him. She would always be that, but she was so much more now; and, again, as on the day he met her in the field of blue-bonnets, he found himself watching her, trying to decide just wherein her charm lay, and how it made her different from any other girl he had ever known. Sometimes he would almost lose what she was saying, puzzling over the problem.

At the stone quarry, while they waited a long time for the engine to switch off some empty cars, and pick up some loaded ones, they left the coach and walked up and down beside the track. They were talking about Gay and Alex, and he laughed at her outspoken honesty in expressing her opinion about their delayed wedding.

"I think it's so sensible for them to wait till he's got something saved up for a rainy day, when he's nothing now but his practice. It's like providing a

sort of financial umbrella. Really, it *is* just like starting out without a sign of an umbrella when you know it's going to rain, and trusting to luck to keep you dry, for people to marry with nothing to depend on but an uncertain salary."

Phil laughed, as he answered, "What a little pessimist you are, Mary. It *doesn't* always rain, and people *have* married without such a provision who lived happily ever after."

"But it does oftener than it doesn't," she insisted. "Papa and mamma lived happily, and he had only his practice as a young lawyer. But look what we've been through since he died. Things wouldn't have come to such a pass when his health broke down if there had been something laid away for such emergencies. Joyce and I have often talked about it when we've had to pinch and work and economize down to the last cent."

"So you'll never marry a man who has only the shelter of a salary to offer you?" said Phil, teasingly.

"I didn't say that," answered Mary, her face puckered up into a puzzled expression. "I don't want to, and I don't *think* I would, but, honestly, I don't know what I would do. I'm afraid that if I loved a man as much as you ought to to be his wife

that I'd be every bit as foolish as anybody else, and that I'd marry him even if I had to take in back stairs to scrub for a living. But I do hope I'll have more sense, or else he won't be that kind of a man. It isn't that I mind work," she added, "but I'm so tired of doing without and making over, and tugging and pulling to make both ends meet. Do you know what they call me at home? The Watch-dog of the Treasury, and you can guess what I've had to be like to earn such a name. I earned it, too, all right. I fought over every penny, and I'd hate to keep on in the same old rut all the rest of my days. It would be so nice to look forward to a luxurious old age."

She laughed when she had said it, but such a tired little sigh came first, and that wistful look again in her honest, straightforward eyes as she glanced up at him, that he was seized with a sudden desire such as no one else had ever inspired before, to pick her up and carry her away from all her troubles; to surround her with all the girlish pleasures and pretty things she loved, and to humor every whim all the rest of her life. But all he said was:

"And if you were a man I suppose you would feel the same way about it."

"Oh, more so!" she cried. "The more I thought

of a girl the surer I'd want to be that she need never face that rainy day unprotected."

She stooped to pick a tiny yellow star from a clump of broom growing alongside the track, and they walked on in silence a moment. Then he said, with an amused side-glance at her:

"You can't imagine how funny it seems to hear such common-sense, practical 'side talks on matrimony' from an eighteen-year-old girl like you. I feel as if I'd had a scolding from my grandmother, and that I'll have to own up that I did it, but I'm sorry and I'll never do it again."

"Did what?" queried Mary in surprise.

"Spent everything as fast as I made it. Had money to burn and burnt it. I don't ask any better salary than I've been receiving for several years. Of course, when I go in by myself, that'll be another matter. But I'll have to own up; out of it all, I've saved practically nothing. I haven't spent it in riotous living, and it doesn't seem that I've been particularly extravagant, but it's gone. It just slipped through my fingers."

"Oh, well, *you*," began Mary. "That's different."

"In what way is it different?" he persisted, when she did not go on.

"Well, if a man doesn't mind getting wet himself

it's nobody's business if he takes chances. It's the man who expects to — to have some one else to protect — who ought to be ready for the possible storms."

"But what makes you think that I'll always go it alone?" insisted Phil. "That I'll never have any one to — protect? That's what you seem to insinuate."

He was looking directly into her eyes, laughingly, teasingly, and a wave of color swept over her face. Roberta would have evaded the question, and turned it off with a laugh. Mary was too simple and direct. It was the moment she had long felt must confront her some time. Her day of reckoning had come for playing eavesdropper. No matter how hard she fought against doing so, she knew she was going to confess that she had been one, albeit unintentionally.

As he repeated his question with smiling insistence, the words stuck in her throat, but the thought uppermost in her mind called out to him by some strange, telepathic power, and he understood as if she had spoken.

"You think," he said slowly, looking into her eyes as if the written words were actually before him there and he was reading them aloud, "you think

that it is on Lloyd's account. How did you know about — *that?*"

It startled her so that he should read her thought in such a way that she could only stammer in reply:

"I — I — heard you singing to her once at The Locusts, that song you sang last night, 'Till the stars are old,' and I thought if you cared for her as it sounded both times, that there *couldn't* be anybody else, *ever!*"

Phil turned partly away from her, and stared off towards the hills a moment, his eyes narrowed into a thoughtful, musing expression. Finally he said, "I thought so, too, Mary, once. I thought it for a number of years. That time will always be one of the sweetest and most sacred of my memories. One's earliest love always is, they say, like the first white violet in the spring."

There was a long pause, then he finished the sentence by turning around to her to say, significantly, "But there's always a summer after every spring, you know. Come on, we'd better be getting aboard again. It looks as if they're about ready to start."

He helped her up the steps and followed her down the aisle. While adjusting the window-shade before she took her seat, he began to talk of other things, and the subject was dropped between them. But

it was not dropped in Mary's mind. She had been called on to adjust herself to a new viewpoint of him so quickly that it left her mentally gasping. With his own hand he had ruthlessly swept away one of her dearest illusions. She had always believed that no matter who else might forget, *he* would always stand as a model of manly constancy. What surprised her now was not his change of view. It was her own. By that one sentence he had made it perfectly clear to her that it was not reasonable to expect him to go on mourning always for the " first white violet." It was only natural that summer should follow the spring.

But the puzzle now was, who was good enough and sweet and high and fine enough to follow Lloyd? Mary was positive that there was nobody. He might hunt the whole world over, but she was sure he would be doomed to disappointment in the end. Her motherly concern over that was almost as great as her sympathy had been when she thought of him as doomed to carry a secret sorrow with him to the grave.

After that the conversation was not so personal. It was nearly noon when they reached Bauer, and in that time they had exchanged views on enough subjects to have filled an encyclopædia. Twice after

that they talked together alone. The first time was when they went out in the boat just before sunset. Mary wanted him to see Fernbank in all its glory of fresh April greenness, with the little waterfalls splashing their fine mist over the walls of delicate maiden-hair.

She insisted on poling the boat, although he protested that it made him uncomfortable to sit still and see her doing the work. He refused to go at all, until she compromised by saying he might pole on the way back.

"It isn't work," she insisted. "It's one of the greatest pleasures I have, and about the only one I've had in this benighted place."

"You always did love to 'paddle your own canoe' and strike out and do things for yourself," he remarked, as they shot swiftly up the stream. "By the way, what are you going to do next? Will you be starting back to Warwick Hall again in September, now that Jack is sure of taking his old position in the mines then?"

"No," was her decided answer. "We've scrapped about that a lot lately. He insists that I must. But it's this way. He's lost a whole year out of his life, and although he's never said so, I know the time is coming when he'll want to settle down and have a

home of his own. And *he's* the kind who'd never ask a girl to marry him until he'd provided for her future in case anything should happen to him. Joyce's plans have been put back a year, too. She has her heart set on going to Paris with Miss Henrietta to study, just as soon as she can afford it. Of course, Jack will pay back his part of what she's spent on us this winter, but it will take a good while for him to do it. I've made up my mind I'm not going to stand in their way. I'll not be a drag on either one of them. There's lots of things that I can do. The summer is already provided for. When Mrs. Mallory found that we are going to stay on here till September, till Jack is strong enough to go back to work, she made up her mind to stay, too. no matter how hot it gets, because the children are so happy here. They can't bear the idea of stopping their lessons. They're beginning to learn to read now, and are as wild over that as if it were a new game. Mrs. Rochester says it does get frightfully hot here in the summers, but that we can stand it if we have the lessons in the morning instead of afternoon."

"And then," asked Phil, "after that?"

"After that I don't know, but there'll be something. It's all uncertain, but it's interesting just to

wonder what will come next. I'm like the wolf in the last of the Mowgli stories."

She turned to glance over her shoulder as she quoted, laughingly, "*' The stars are thin,' said Gray Brother, sniffing at the dawn wind. 'Where shall we lair to-day? For, from now, we follow new trails.'* I don't know where the new trails will lead, but from all that's happened in the past, I've faith to believe that there'll be 'good hunting' in them."

"There will always be that for you," said Phil, warmly. "You'll never strike one where you'll not find friends and interests and — "

He started to say more, but checked himself, and after an instant's pause, stood up, almost upsetting the boat, and laughingly took the oar away from her, insisting that he couldn't sit still another minute. He had to work off some of his surplus energy.

What he had come near saying when he checked himself was, "And you'll never strike a trail where you won't be the bravest, jolliest, dearest little comrade a man could have; one that he would never tire of, one who could inspire him to do and be his best."

The impulse to say all this came upon him so suddenly that it startled him. Then a sober second thought told him that after all she was scarcely more

than a child, that she had always looked upon him as an elderly brother, and that it would be better not to destroy that old intimate relationship until he was sure of being able to establish a new one. A strange feeling of humility took possession of him. It suddenly seemed that he had so little to offer one who could give so much. Even her opinion which he had laughed at at the stone quarry, about providing a financial umbrella, carried weight now, and made him hesitate, no longer confidant of himself.

His strong, quick sweeps of the oar sent the boat upstream at twice the speed it had been going before, and Mary, from her seat in the stern, called out that it was as good as flying, and that she'd have to acknowledge that she'd never known before how delightful it was to sit still and let somebody else do the paddling. But that was because nobody else had taken her along so fast.

At Fernbank they did not get out of the boat. Phil took the seat facing her, while they drifted around the deep pool for a little while. It was almost twilight there, for the high bank shut out the glow of the sunset, and it was deliciously cool and green and still. Presently some remark of Phil's made Mary exclaim:

"That reminds me, although I don't know why it

should, of something I've been intending to tell you, that Joyce wrote recently. You've heard her talk of little Jules Ciseaux, the boy who played such an important part in her winter in France. He lived in the house with the giant scissors on the gables, and over the great gate, you know. Well, he's over here in America now. He's always wanted to come ever since Joyce told him so much about it. His mother was an American and I think he was born in this country. At any rate, he's here now, sight-seeing and trying to hunt up his mother's family.

"He's come into quite a large fortune lately, ever so many hundred thousand francs. As he is of age, he can do as he pleases. Joyce says he wants to come out to Lone Rock to see us, because she used to entertain him by the hour with tales of us, and he used to envy us our good times together in the little brown house at Plainsville. He never knew any home life like ours. I'm wild to see him. Joyce says he is charming! Such lovely manners, and such a sensitive, refined face, like one's ideal of a young poet. He's really something of an artist. Joyce says he's done some really creditable work, and all her friends have taken him up and are making it nice for him while he is in New York."

"That *is* interesting," said Phil. "I'll look him

up as soon as I get back. Wouldn't it be romantic if the friendship that started between them as children should grow into something more? All those inherited francs would provide the fine, large umbrella which you seem to think is necessary."

"Oh, it never can be anything but friendship in this case," exclaimed Mary. "Jules is two years younger than Joyce."

"By the same token he is three years older than you. Maybe it's Joyce's little sister he will be taking an interest in."

"Humph! You're as bad as Norman!" replied Mary, calmly. "That's what *he* said. He thought he had something new to tease me about, but he soon found out that it wouldn't work."

Despite her indifference, Phil thought of the possibility again many times that night before he fell asleep. Knowing the limited space of the cottage, he had taken a room at the Williams House, despite Mrs. Ware's protests, saying he would be over early in the morning for breakfast. But it seemed for awhile that breakfast-time would arrive before he could fall asleep.

Things assume formidable proportions in the darkness and dead quiet of the night that they never have by day. Away after midnight he was still think-

ing of what Mary had said about the young Frenchman who had lately come into his fortune, and of what Roberta had said about Lieutenant Boglin. The face of the latter rose up before him. Not a particularly good-looking face, he thought, but it was a strong, likable one, and he had a sense of humor which made him good company, and a blarney-stone turn of the tongue that would take with any girl. As for Jules Ciseaux, who had envied the Wares their home life, Phil knew all about the childhood of the lonely little lad left to the mercies of a brutal caretaker. Jules would only need to see Mary once, dear little home-maker that she was, to want to carry her away with him to his chateau beside the Loire.

Before Phil finally fell asleep he had decided just what he would say to Mary next morning, and that he would go early enough to make an opportunity to say it. It *was* early when he went striding down the road, across the foot-bridge, and took the short cut through a meadow to the back of the Ware cottage; but the preparations for breakfast were well under way. When he reached the back porch, screened by morning-glory vines, he saw the table set out there, with fresh strawberries at each place, wreathed in their own green leaves.

Judging from the odors wafted through the door, chickens were broiling within to exactly the right degree of delectable crispness, and coffee which would be of amber clearness, was in the making. But the noises within the kitchen were not to be interpreted as easily as the odors. There was a banging and scuffling over the floor, muffled shrieks and broken sentences in high voices, choking with laughter. Not till he reached the open window and looked in could he imagine the cause of the uproar. Norman and Mary were wrestling and romping all over the kitchen, having a tug-of-war over something he was trying to take away from her.

Unconscious of a spectator, they dragged each other around, bumping against walls amid a clatter of falling tinware, stumbling over chairs and coming to a deadlock in each others' arms in a corner, so full of laughter they could scarcely hold their grip.

"Dare me again! will you?" gasped Norman, thinking he had her pinned to the wall. But wrenching one hand free, she began to tickle him until he writhed away from her with a whoop, and dashed out of the door.

"Yah! 'Fraid cat!" she jeered after him. "Afraid of a tickle!"

"You just wait till I get back with the milk," he

cried, catching up a shining tin pail that stood on the bench, and starting down the path over which Phil had just come.

"You'll have to hurry," she called after him. "Breakfast is almost ready."

She stooped to open the oven door and peep at the pan of biscuit within, just beginning to turn a delicate brown. Then she looked up and caught sight of Phil. He was leaning against the window looking in, his arms crossed on the sill as if he had been enjoying the spectacle for some time.

"For mercy sakes!" she exclaimed. "How long have you been there?"

The coast was clear. Norman was well on his way to the Metz place, and Mrs. Ware was helping Jack get ready for breakfast. It was as good an opportunity as Phil could have hoped for, to repeat the speech he had rehearsed so many times the night before. And she looked so fresh and wholesome and sweet, standing there in her pink morning dress with the big white apron, that she was more like an apple-blossom than anything else he could think of. He wanted to tell her so; to tell her she had never seemed so dear and desirable as she did at this moment, when he must be going away to leave her.

MARY WARE IN TEXAS.

Well, I'm going away and I may not see you again.

Yet how could he tell her, when she was all a-giggle and a-dimple and aglow from her romp with Norman? Clearly she was too far from his state of mind to share it now, or even to understand it. After all, she was only a little girl at heart — only eighteen. It wasn't fair to her to awaken her quite yet — to hurry her into giving a promise when she couldn't possibly know her own mind. He would wait —

So he only leaned on the window-sill and laughed at her for having been caught in such an undignified romp, and asked her when she intended to grow up, and if she ever expected to outgrow her propensity for scrapping. But when he had joked thus a few minutes, he said, quite suddenly and seriously, "Mary, I want you to promise me something."

She was taking the chickens from the broiler and did not look at him until they were safely landed in the hot platter awaiting them, but she said lightly, "Yes, your 'ighness. To the 'arf of me kingdom. Wot is it?"

"Well, I'm going away and I may not see you again for a long time. The chief wants me to take a position, engineering the construction of a big dam down in Mexico. It would keep me down there two

years, but it would be the biggest thing I've had yet, in every way. Last night I just about made up my mind I'd take it.

"While I'm gone you will be striking out into all sorts of new trails, and I am afraid that on some of them somebody will come along and try to persuade you to join him on his, even if you are such a little girl. Now I want to have a hand in choosing the right man, and I want you to promise me that you won't let anybody persuade you to do that till I come back. Or at least if they do try, that you'll send me word that they're trying, and give me a chance to come back and have a look at the fellow, and see if I think he is good enough to carry you off."

"Why, the idea!" she laughed, a trifle embarrassed, but immensely pleased that he should think it possible for her to have numerous suitors or to have them soon, and flattered that he should take enough interest in her future to want to be called back from Mexico to direct her choice.

"But will you promise?" he urged.

"Yes; that is not much to promise."

"And you'll give me your hand on it?" he persisted.

"Yes, and cross my heart and body in the bar-

gain," she added, lightly, "if that'll please you any better."

For all his gravity, she thought he was jesting until she reached her hand through the window to seal the compact.

"You know," he said, as his warm fingers closed over it, "I've never yet seen anybody whom I considered good enough for little Mary Ware."

Her eyes fell before the seriousness of his steady glance, and she turned away all in a flutter of pleasure that the "Best Man" should have said such a lovely thing about *her*. It was the very thing she had always thought about him.

Mrs. Ware came out just then, wheeling Jack in his chair, and soon after Norman was back with the milk, and breakfast was served out on the porch among the morning-glories. "A perfect breakfast and a perfect morning," Phil said. The 'bus which was to call for him came while they were still lingering around the table, and there was only time for a hasty good-by all around.

"Come and walk out to the gate with me, Mary, and give me a good send-off," he said, hurriedly snatching up his suit-case.

Now in this last moment, when there was much to say, neither had a word, and they walked along in

silence until they reached the gate. There he turned for one more hand-clasp.

"Remember your promise," he said, gravely, as his fingers closed warmly over hers. "I meant every word I said."

"I'll remember," she answered, dimpling again as if he had reminded her of a good joke; "and I'll keep my word. Honest, I will!"

With that he went away, carrying with him a picture which he recalled a thousand times in the months that followed; Mary, standing at the gate in the pink and white dress that had the freshness of a spring blossom, with her sweet, sincere eyes and her dear little mouth saying, "I'll keep my word! Honest, I will!"

It was a long, long, hot summer that followed. The drought dried up the creek so that the boat lay idle on the bank. The dust grew deeper and deeper in the roads and lay thick on the wayside weeds. Even the trees were powdered with it; all the green of the landscape took on an ashen grayness. Meadows lay parched and sere. Walking ceased to be a pleasure, and as they gasped through the tropical heat of the endless afternoons, they longed for the dense shade of the pines at Lone Rock, and counted the days till they could go back.

But as soon as the sun dropped behind the hills each day, and the breeze started up from the far-away Gulf, their discomfort was forgotten. In the wonderful brilliance of the starry nights when there was no moon, or in the times when one hung like a luminous pearl above a silver world, the air grew fresh and cool, and they sat late in the open, making the most of every minute. In the early mornings there was that same crisp freshness of the hills again, so one could endure the merciless, yellow glare and the panting heat of the afternoons, for the sake of the nights and dawns.

Even without that, however, they would have been content to stay on, enduring it gladly, for Jack was daily growing stronger; and to see him moving about the house on his own feet, no matter how falteringly at first, was a cause for hourly rejoicing.

Mary still played the part of Baloo with Brud and Sister, starting early in the morning and taking them over to the old mill-dam, in the shade of some big cypress and sycamore trees. She was teaching them to read and write, but there was little poring over books for them. They built their letters out of stones, and fashioned whole sentences of twigs; wrote them in the sand and modelled them in mud, scratched them on rocks with bits of flint, as Indians

do their picture language, and pricked them in the broad sycamore leaves with thorns. By the end of the summer they had enough of a vocabulary to write a brief letter to their father, and their pride knew no bounds when each had achieved one entirely alone, from date to stamp, and dropped it into the box at the post-office. His pride in them was equally great, and the letter that he sent Mary with her final check was one of the few things which she carried away from Texas as a cherished memento.

She did not write often in her Good Times book. There was so little to chronicle. An occasional visit from the Barnaby's, a call at the rectory, a few minutes spent in neighborly gossip in the Metz garden; never once in the whole summer a happening more exciting than that, except when the troops from Fort Sam Houston were ordered out on their annual "hike" and passed through Bauer in July. Each of the different divisions camped a day and a night in the grove back of the cottage, near enough for the Wares to watch every manœuvre. The Artillery band played at sunset when it was in camp, and gave a concert that night in the plaza. When the Cavalry passed through, Lieutenant Boglin came to supper and spent the evening. Gay was up for a day twice, and Mary went once to San

Antonio. That was all. Yet stupid as it was for a girl of her age, and much as she missed young companionship, Mary managed to get through the summer very happily. All its unpleasantness was atoned for one day in early September, when she looked out to see Jack going down the road, straight and strong, pushing his own wheeled chair in front of him. He was taking it down to Doctor Mackay's office to leave "for the first poor devil who needs it," he said.

In the last few weeks he had discovered what he had not known before, that the town was full of invalids in quest of health, attracted from all over the country by the life-giving air of its hills. He had made the acquaintance of a number of them since he had been able to ride around with the doctor. Now, as he went off down the road with the chair, with all of the family at the window to see the happy sight, Mrs. Ware repeated to Mary what the doctor had said about Jack's effect on his other patients, and what the rector had told her of the regard all the villagers had for Jack.

"The dear boy's year of suffering has done one thing for the world," she added. "It has given it another Aldebaran. Don't you remember in *The Jester's Sword* —" She quoted it readily, because

ever since she had first seen it she had always read Jack's name in place of Aldebaran's:

"'*It came to pass whenever he went by, men felt a strange, strength-giving influence radiating from his presence, a sense of hope. One could not say exactly what it was, it was so fleeting, so intangible, like warmth that circles from a brazier, or perfume that is wafted from an unseen rose.*' That's what one feels whenever Jack comes near."

"Yes, I know," assented Mary. "Even old Mr. Metz tried to say as much to me about him. He didn't choose those words, of course, but in his own broken way he meant the same thing."

When the day came to leave, there was no one to go with them to the station. The Rochesters were away on their vacation, and it was too early in the morning for the Barnabys to come in from the ranch. They had bidden each other good-by the day before, with deep regrets on both sides. It seemed so good to both Mary and her mother to see Jack attending to the tickets and the trunks in his old way, so quick and capable. While he was getting the checks, Mary walked down the track a little piece to a place where she could look back at the town for one more picture to carry away in her memory.

How friendly and homelike and dear it seemed now. Between the belfry of St. Peter's and the gray tower of Holy Angels, rose the smoke from many breakfast fires, and the windmills twirled merrily in the morning sun. For all its dreariness she was carrying away the recollection of a score of happy times.

Over there was the free camp-yard, where their little Christmas tree had spread such cheer. Further on shone the spire of St. Boniface. She would always think of it as she saw it Easter morning, its casement windows set wide, and its altar white with the snowy beauty of the rain lilies. There was the meadow through which she had gone in bluebonnet time, to find Phil waiting under the *huisache* tree, and there the creek, running on to Fernbank. Nearer by she could see the windmill tower she had so often climbed, sticking up over the roof that had sheltered them during the ten months they had been in Bauer. "Dear little old Bauer," she thought, gratefully. She wouldn't have believed it in the beginning if anyone had told her, that there would be any regrets in her leave-taking when the time came to go. How wonderfully it had all turned out. The crooked *had* been made straight, and the rough places smooth. She could face the future

gladly, buoyantly, now, no matter what it held, since Jack was well again.

"Come on, Mary, it's time to go aboard!" called Norman.

"You go on in, and save me a seat," she called back. "Here come the children. I must wait to speak to them."

She had bidden them good-by the night before, and had not expected to see them again. They came running, out of breath. Sister had a little bag of animal crackers she had brought as a farewell offering, and Brud proffered a companion-piece, a sack of sticky red cinnamon drops. They had cried the night before, and they were close to tears now, realizing that something very rare and precious was passing out of their lives. She took their offerings with thanks that brought smiles to their dejected little faces, then once more stooped to kiss them good-by.

"From now, it's new trails for all of us," she said, lightly, "and you'll write and tell me what you find in yours, and I'll write and tell you about mine."

On the platform of the car she turned for a last look at the three disconsolate little figures, waiting to watch her start off towards those new trails. There were three, for Uncle August had joined

them now, squatting mournfully beside them as if he, too, were losing his best playfellow. The train began to move slowly out. As she clung to the railing to wave to them one more time, a mournful little pipe followed her shrilly down the track. It was Brud's voice:

"Good hunting, Miss Mayry! Good hunting!"

THE END.

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